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retro GAMER

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DK

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR BEST MOMENT IN GOLDENEYE?



DARRAN JONES

Setting proximity mines in the toilet and then laughing deliriously when my friends found my gift.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two lovely girls and **Retro Gamer**
Currently playing:
Magic The Gathering Online
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

The discovery of how great a multiplayer experience it was. I was playing it round a mate's house and knew right then I would be saving like mad to get my own machine and game.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Vanquish
Favourite game of all time:
Vanquish



JASON KELK

Somehow, I've actually managed to totally avoid playing *GoldenEye* over the years!
Expertise:
All things homebrew-related
Currently playing:
Space Invaders: Infinity Gene
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

My favourite bit of *GoldenEye*? No idea. My least favourite bit was not being able to play it at the time, due to being a penniless student. PITY ME!
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Axe In Face
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



DAVID CROOKES

All of it. I also recall my first meeting with the cool Martin Hollis. An 'um, ah' moment with me unsure who he was - then he gave me his card. Cue a very red face.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DRURY

Shooting the guard while he's sitting on the bog. I'm concerned what this says about me.
Expertise:
Andy Capp's Tavern
Currently playing:
Professor Layton And The Lost Future
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



ANDREW FISHER

The first time I stopped the soldiers setting off the alarm in the compound, so I wasn't swamped by the reinforcements and actually got a bit further into the game…
Expertise: Commodore 64
Currently playing:
DJ Hero
Favourite game of all time:
The Sentinel

LOADING...



Those with eager eyes may have noticed that it now says 'Award Winning' on the front cover. The reason for this is because we beat several others to the UK's most prestigious prize in magazine journalism.

The Games Media Awards are held every year, and while we've always been nominated, the award's always gone to *Edge* or **games**™. This year was different, though. While we were convinced the recently deceased *PC Zone* would walk away with the coveted prize, we bloody won it instead!

For a niche mag to win such a mainstream award is an incredible achievement, and when you consider our competition it makes the triumph all the sweeter. We've had a fantastic year, which has seen John Romero guest editing, the introduction of exciting and inventive covers and an increasing readership. Not to mention new features like Same Name Different Game, Future Classic, The Unconverted and this issue's Obscura Machina, so it feels incredibly gratifying that all the hard work Stuart, Stephen, our freelancers and myself put in has finally paid off.

However, **Retro Gamer** wouldn't be anything without you, the reader, so thanks for your support and pushing us to make the best gaming mag available in the UK.

Enjoy the magazine



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>> Load 83 Breathing new life into classic games



In the hot seat this month…











"It has all the makings of a classic title" Kim Wild

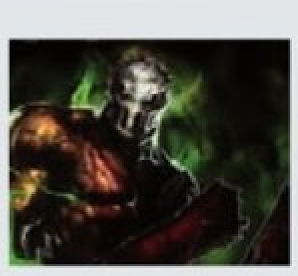




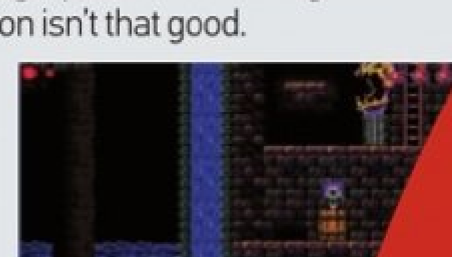




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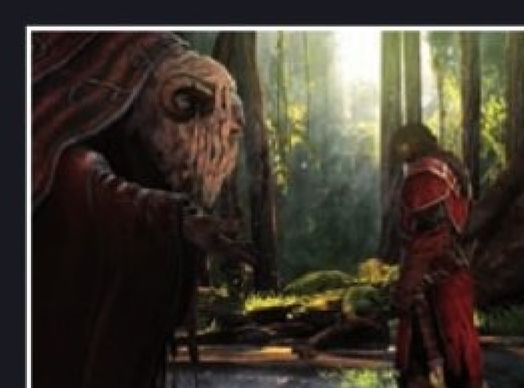






ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED





retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> There has certainly been a lot going on this month. GOG upset some of its customers with a poorly conceived publicity stunt, the closure of Krome Studios has cast doubt on the future of Game Room, and Konami has delivered the goods again with the announcement of more Castlevania and classic X-Men...

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GO DEEPER

>> Good Old Games was formed in 2008 and is owned by the Poland-based CD Projekt.

>> Unlike Steam, there is no DRM protection on titles from Good Old Games, so users can make personal backups if they so wish.

>> In addition to offering complete versions of games, GOG also adds many freebies, ranging from soundtracks to avatars, pictures and maps.





» [PC] *Duke Nukem 3D*: just one of the many games available to download from Good Old Games.

GOOD GOG

GOOD OLD GAMES' LAUNCH OF ITS NEW WEBSITE DOESN'T GO TO PLAN...

If you love classic PC gaming than you're no doubt fully aware of Good Old Games, a popular site that allows you to legally purchase and download a number of classic PC titles. Priced at $9.99 and under, and usually packed with extras, it's been a big success in the last two years, offering a solid, retro alternative to Steam. Sadly, however, a recent closure of its main site sent panic through its community when consumers realised that they may have lost their paid games forever, which in turn revealed just how fragile the download market can potentially be.

While GOG never actually stated that it was closing down for good and did take steps to quell the initial panic, when the founders finally appeared on YouTube dressed as monks in order to atone for their sins, many loyal customers failed to see the funny side. With that in mind, we were able to speak to GOG's MD Guillaume Rambourg and found out exactly what was happening.

Retro Gamer: Where did the idea for your publicity stunt originate?

Guillaume Rambourg: First of all, I would like to stress that we had to go down anyway due to technical reasons. GOG was in beta since October 2008 and the previous web code was quite rusty, to be honest. It basically did not allow us to safely deploy new features and handle the big boost of traffic we were expecting with the releases of *Baldur's Gate* and *Planescape: Torment*. Therefore, we had to write again around 98 per cent of the code and deploy a brand new IT infrastructure to make the new website available.

Being down for a few days was certainly going to be a tough moment for everybody, and we had numerous internal discussions to decide which communication line to pick. Two possibilities were on the plate: one was doing an official boring announcement; the other was taking a more creative route to send a message to the industry. We went for the second option after quite some debate, as we believe the gaming industry has become dead serious over the last few years.

PC gaming has always been a smart world, where creators and consumers think in a different way and fully appreciate our noble art. These values have been the essence of GOG since the very beginning and we will never give up on that. To answer your question, we have




» You can see GOG's bizarre apology by visiting www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATNd4qbNTf8

always been gamers at GOG, and our aim was to create a discussion within the industry about our ambiguous four-day closure. Why do people buy games today? In this marketing-driven world, are we still all certain our decisions are motivated by the right reasons? Where is the passion in today's industry? We at GOG have been trying to modestly bring some answers to these questions in the past two years.

RG: Are you concerned that the way you handled the shutdown will have lost you respect?
GR: We were aware of that risk, just like we were worried about losing credibility for taking down the website for four days due to technical reasons. Unfortunately, side impacts could not be avoided, but we tried to limit these as proactively as possible. On the first day of our closure, we posted an announcement, giving a few hints about a probable comeback very soon. On the second day, we clearly stated that every user would be able to access his or her collection of titles starting from Thursday. On day three, we posted a mysterious YouTube video giving indications that some new features and content were likely to come back. Eventually, we made all of that crystal clear on Wednesday, the day before the reopening.

In reality, we noticed that our closure caused much more confusion than expected, both among gamers and media. One aspect we clearly underestimated is the fact that users were relying so much on our platform to access the games they had purchased. Unlike other digital distribution platforms, GOG allows users to download their DRM-free titles as many times as they like and thus play their games on any computer. We believed this feature was quite popular among our user base. If we had known before, we would have probably also considered creating a temporary website where users could at least download their purchased titles while we were down.

RG: Is there anything you'd like to say to those readers who were upset and angry at the way you handled the changeover?
GR: That we never intended to harm anybody. All we wanted was to initiate a debate within the industry during our temporary closure. Again, we are gamers in the first place and our most sincere wish is to keep the gaming passion alive. When we realised how much confusion and shock there was during our closure, we decided to host our online press conference dressed as monks to ask for redemption and give some explanations.

RG: Are you pleased with the progress in the last two years?
GR: Definitely. As of today, we have over 40 publishers and developers on board, and 300+ DRM-free classics, which feature tons of free goodies. Those figures aside, our biggest satisfaction is to have succeeded in delivering a fresh offering to the users.

When we launched GOG back in October 2008, our main desire was to provide people with a hassle-free experience [to get] your good old title running full-screen on your modern computer. This may sound simple, but there were some challenges to achieve that. The first two years were a good start. But we still have much to achieve.

RG: How hard was it to secure *Baldur's Gate* and *Planescape*?
GR: Nothing less than two years of hard work. It was actually our dream since the very beginning of GOG to provide our users with those great titles, both for personal – we have some RPG freaks at the office! – and historical reasons. The legal background behind *Baldur's Gate* and *Planescape: Torment* was quite complex, and this is why it took GOG so much time to have the deal signed. This is a major milestone in GOG's history, to be honest.

RG: Will we see more *Dungeons & Dragons* games in the future?
GR: Our agreement with Hasbro was signed for seven games in total. As of today, we have released three games: *Baldur's Gate*, *Planescape: Torment* and *Icewind Dale Complete*. By the time the magazine will hit the shelves we'll have *Temple Of Elemental Evil* and *Neverwinter Nights Diamond* on the site. The two remaining games should be an easy guess for all retro gamers, so I'll leave this up to them to discover if they were right.

RG: What PC holy grails do you still feel you're missing?
GR: Too many to list them all! We would love to bring back some great PC content from big publishers such as Electronic Arts and LucasArts, for example, or smaller gems such as *Little Big Adventure*. Most of the remaining games we are running for at the moment will be tough to sign, as the rights of those titles are very often scattered between several owners. But hey, we managed to sign *Baldur's Gate* and *Planescape: Torment*, so nothing is impossible!

RG: What plans do you have lined up for GOG over the next year?
GR: GOG is a young company and our key aim will simply be to consolidate our past efforts. We have solid foundations, so let's add a few more bricks to make the house bigger and more robust, basically. *

THE RETRO DEBATE

» How do you feel about GOG's recent publicity stunt?

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Crunchy
They lost me for good. Any company who thinks it's fine to take the mickey out of their customers can get stuffed.

harlequ1n
I was sad and angry at first, but the whole thing made me chuckle in the end.

TMR
It didn't offend me personally, but it should've been obvious that a stunt like this is going to alienate a lot of existing customers and possibly even scare off new ones.

FooAtari
It perhaps wasn't the smartest way to go offline while they updated things, although if you read the statement they made at the time, it didn't actually say the site was closing. People, including me, just jumped to conclusions.

FatTrucker
It was a bit like faking your own death to see how many people turned up to the funeral. While it undoubtedly generated enough of a buzz around the web to raise their profile, it remains to be seen whether it generates enough new custom to compensate for lost customers that felt offended.

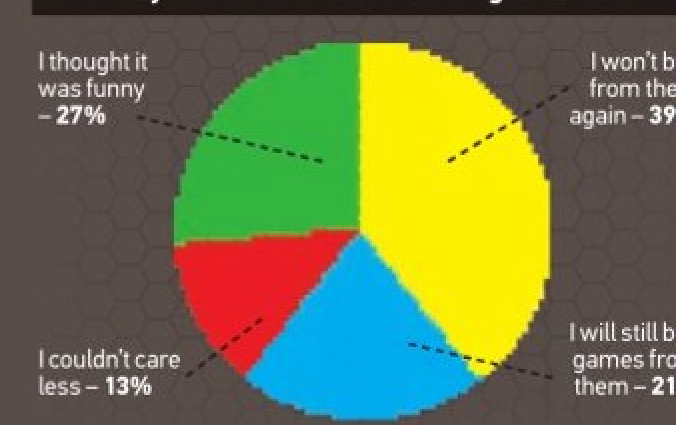
Freestyler
I understand why they did it, and why they felt they had to, but that in no way excuses their conduct. It's that sort of Max Clifford-style blagging that the games industry can definitely do without. A clear case of manipulation.

Naitch
To be honest, I hadn't heard of them before I'd read this, and then I checked them up and found out what all the hoo-ha was about. It even seems to have made more people aware of them, including me for one!

Timothy Lumsden
For the sake of a few potential new customers, GOG was prepared to make their existing customers feel disappointment. If that sounds like good PR, they must subscribe to the 'any exposure is good exposure' idea.

FORUM OPINION

How do you feel about GOG's handling of its new site?



retro columns

>> RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Illustration by **Lee Piper**

Peripherals

The world is a frenzy at the thought of Kinect coming out for the 360 and the Wavy Hand Stick thingy on the PS3. People are eating each others' faces off in the streets, unable to keep calm at the thought of being able to talk to an 11-year-old boy called Milo (what do you mean *Milo* isn't being released? But Peter Molyneux said he was ages ago! Oh yeah… point taken) and to drag things through thin air and make stuff happen on the telly screen, like that film with Tom Cruise. Risky Business, I think it was.

But getting slightly aroused by peripherals, hardware, 'expensive pieces of shit' (as my dad used to call them) is nothing new. At a time when most of my friends were learning about their bodies while flicking through their mum's Freemans catalogue, I remember being obsessed with some very dull computer mags as a young lad, furiously enjoying myself as I looked at the prices of dual disc drives for the BBC.

These price listings were like porn to me (just to clarify, in case you didn't quite get that point in the previous paragraph). And like all good pornography (really hammering the point home now, aren't I?), its subjects were completely unobtainable. There was no way my parents were ever going to spend a significant amount of money on something that they couldn't see the point of. The conversations, which were had on a weekly basis, went something like this:

Me: Dad, can you buy me a dual disc drive with the ability to play both 40 and 80 track, please?

Dad: What does it do?

Me: Well, it loads games much faster.

Dad: Is that it?

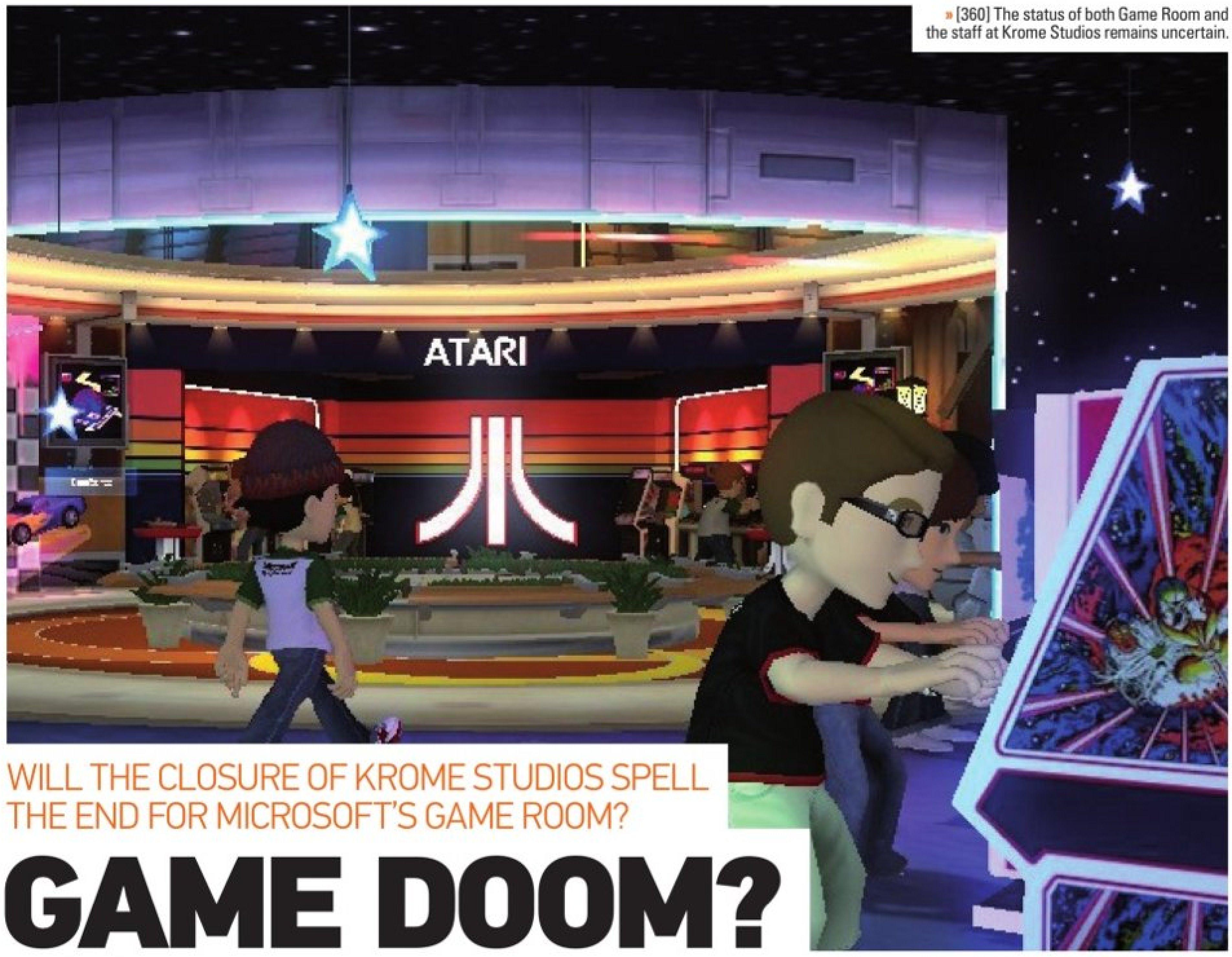
Me: I can also get an expanded version of *Elite*, with like missions and stuff. It's much cooler than the tape version.

Dad: You've got two chances: no hope and Bob Hope (it's true, my dad would actually say this. I only later found out that he had got the saying completely wrong, so I guess in many ways, I had the last laugh).

It wasn't until I was much older that I finally got my dual disc drive. I found it in a car boot sale and lugged it home in a black bin liner. Those Cumana drives are just stunning pieces of kit and they are built like bloody tanks. Even now I get such a thrill from flicking that little arm down and hearing the gentle whirr as it boots up. And it still astounds me how quickly it can bring up a menu of games.

Will Microsoft's Kinect still be giving me a semi in 26 years' time? I doubt it. It could be hiding in the attic, another piece of forgotten equipment that seemed like a good investment at the time, just like my original *Samba De Amigo* maracas and my VIC-20.

I remember being obsessed with some very dull computer mags as a young lad



» [360] The status of both Game Room and the staff at Krome Studios remains uncertain.

WILL THE CLOSURE OF KROME STUDIOS SPELL THE END FOR MICROSOFT'S GAME ROOM?

GAME DOOM?

Krome has recently closed its doors for good, leaving hundreds of staff out of work and the future of Game Room in flux.

Krome Studios, which acquired the classic 8-bit publisher Melbourne House from Atari in 2006, was formed in 1999 and was heavily involved in making titles based on existing franchises such as *Spyro The Dragon* or film licences. *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, *Transformers: Revenge Of The Fallen* and *Hellboy: The Science Of Evil* are just a few of its more recent titles, while the fun, if rather flawed, *Blade Kitten* marked its first original property since 2002's *Ty The Tasmanian Tiger*.

Rumblings of Krome's difficulties began when 60 employees lost their jobs in November 2009. Another 50 members of staff were made redundant in April this year, and an undisclosed number were let go in August, which resulted in the closure of Krome's Adelaide branch.

As of 15 October, all remaining staff were let go, although it is believed that a small team of contractors will stay on to complete unfinished work. While this is obviously crushing news for the staff of Krome, readers have already been asking what this means for the future of Game Room. The truth of the matter is, at this moment in time, we just don't know. We've currently been unable to speak to anyone at Microsoft, and obviously no one at Krome is returning our calls due to the current situation.

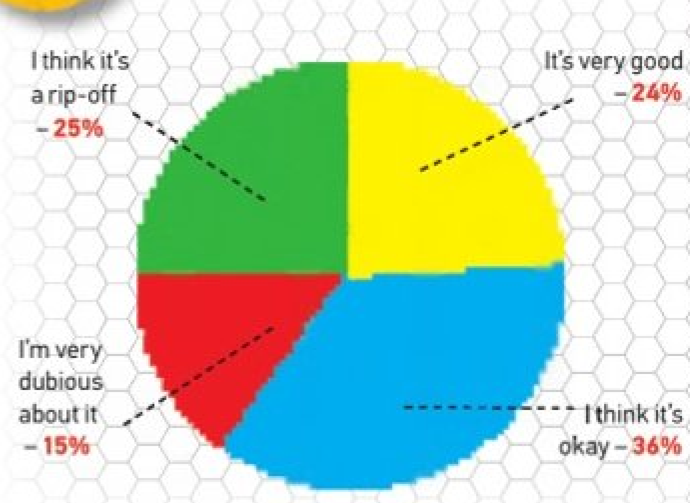
There's no denying that Game Room hasn't met our original expectations, with little publisher support and few triple-A games making an appearance on the service. Updates have been increasingly underwhelming in recent months, which may be explained by Krome's recent problems, but a small part of us is still convinced that Microsoft can turn the service around, should it wish to do so. With the infrastructure for the service already in place, Microsoft could concentrate on simply attracting the big names like Namco, Capcom and Sega, dropping the console releases, and returning to the classic arcade pitch that made us so excited in the first place.

While some – based on feedback on the forum – feel that Krome got its just desserts for simply churning out licensed games of varying quality, it's nevertheless a huge blow for the hard-working staff and the Australian games industry in general. Here's hoping that other Australian development studios don't suffer the same fate. *

FORUM OPINION

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Game Room: Good or bad?



"I was very disappointed. Won't start it up again until they release more and better games for it" – **lostSUNDAY**

"I just can't see Game Room ever redeeming itself. It's too late now" – **Crunchy**

"I think the idea of it all is great, but they need some more recent stuff" – **Uaithne**

MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» More lords

Well this is a great surprise. We've only just reviewed *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow*, but a sequel has already been announced. Oscar Arujo, the composer behind the excellent soundtrack, recently let slip that the sequel's music will be "even more spectacular". Needless to say, we're dreadfully excited about this, especially as the first game in this new line features one of the best endings in recent memory.



» RunOut

The amazing *OutRun Online Arcade* is no longer available to buy on PSN or Xbox Live Arcade. Sega's rights to the Ferrari name have expired, so it was immediately pulled from PSN in order to make way for System 3's *Ferrari: The Race Experience* – interestingly, it was still available on Live Arcade when we went to press. Previous purchasers will still be able to download the game when needed.



» X marks the spot

More great Konami news, as the publisher announced that one of its revered scrolling fighters, *X-Men*, would be returning via Xbox Live Arcade and PSN. The excellent six-player brawler will feature drop-in online play, the Japanese version – which included power-ups and health packs – and brand new voice acting. There's no price point yet, but 800 Points would make us more than happy.

Here's my bio…

In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *CVG*. I led the *CVG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of CVG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

All men play on 10



Illustration by **Lee Piper**

I'm not very good at games, and I never have been. Maybe you're one of those that are good at games? You'll probably think I'm a twerp for what I'm about to say next. Humour me, okay?

Let's go as far back as *Space Invaders* to help get something straight. There were no Easy, Normal or Hard settings on the early games. They were like chess or Monopoly; the basic components leaving you to figure it out. There was a hard line even in *Pac-Man*, but once you acquired the skill you could do okay. Videogames used to play cricket with a cork ball and heavy wooden bat, not a tennis ball and plastic replica bat. But you learned how to play properly.

Heck, what am I getting at? Oh yeah… I've recently rediscovered the pleasure of getting through games on their hardest difficulty. Admittedly it takes me about four hours to get past five minutes of gameplay, but the adrenaline buzz is absolutely fantastic. The last time I bothered doing this sort of thing was probably *Thunder Force III* on 'Mania'. It was amazing. I got the bug again after pushing myself through *Halo: Reach* on Legendary playing solo. It made me feel superhuman for a week.

Thinking about it, this could be related to what I was saying last month about Mario. There are no Easy, Normal, Difficult settings on *Super Mario* platform games. You head out into the Worlds and see what can be done about all the obstacles. Everyone in the real world is given the same chance. Until you get the basics sorted you're going nowhere. It even risks upsetting you a little bit to make sure you've finally got it. Then you feel elated and find the next brick wall to bang your head against for a while. It always makes me smile when *Super Mario* is kicking my arse.

I think a lot of old timers like me have been trying to pinpoint why games are starting to feel so empty despite becoming more impressive. This whole difficulty thing has got to be an important part of the puzzle. If you bounce through *Reach* on Normal or easier, you don't truly engage the enemy. However, some people (like 'some people' who park their cars across two spaces) just want to say they got to the end.

So I'm grateful to Bungie for making a new game that reveals so much more of its inner workings and teaches me to play better when all its components are firing on all cylinders. Conquering *Reach* on Legendary was extremely challenging but always completely fair. This is how it used to be on all the best games, and why I still respect gamers who acquire uncanny skills that push games designers to set the stage with care and precision. The best games have never been mindless entertainment, even if mainstream media still prefers to see them that way.

The last time I bothered doing this sort of thing was Thunder Force III on 'Mania'

ATARI GOES PORTABLE

ATARI'S 2600 INVADES THE NINTENDO DS IN A BRAND NEW RETRO COMPILATION

Fans of Atari will be pleased to hear that a brand new compilation of past classics is heading to Nintendo's DS. *Atari's Greatest Hits: Volume 1* will consist of 50 vintage games, with the vast majority of the included titles making an appearance being Atari 2600 ports.

Confirmed arcade conversions include *Missile Command, Pong, Centipede* and *Asteroids*, although there's no news as to whether they will feature new control methods to make use of the DS's touch screen. What we do know, though, is that there will be single-card multiplayer play for 20 games ranging from *Pong* to *Space Duel*, the cartridge will be loaded with authentic manuals, and modern updates will also be available.

This last reveal fills us with dread, as we can still remember the risible DS effort *Retro Atari Classics*, released back in 2005, but hopefully this offering will feature far better updates. We're also concerned by the small number of arcade games and hope that we won't end up with lesser 2600 ports of some of Atari's best titles.

Still, there's no denying that 50 games – or 100 if you include the alternate versions – is good value for money. We just hope that *Volume 2* will feature a lot more arcade titles on it. *



» [DS] *Tempest* has been released countless times in the past, but we'll buy it again if the conversion is good.









WIN A PS3 GAMING CHAIR

BOYS STUFF ALLOWS YOU TO PLAY GAMES IN STYLE



Fed up of your boring old armchair? Not getting the most out of that gaming bean bag? Then we just might have a solution for you – the X-Dream Gyroxus PS3 Gaming Chair. We've been reliably informed that this is the only gyroscopic PS3 gaming chair available. With no motors or power assistance of any kind, the Gyroxus still manages to deliver a realistic simulator experience for racing, sports, flying and combat games.

The chair comes complete with a customised PS3 wireless controller – you can also buy an Xbox 360 controller if you bat for both teams – and there are no drivers to install. If you like the sound of that but lack the funds to make the dream a reality, then pay attention as there's still a chance you could be moving with the action after all. We've teamed up with **www.BoysStuff.co.uk** to give away a chair (RRP £399.99) to one lucky reader.

To be in with a chance of winning, send us the answer to this simple question:

What year was *OutRun* first released?

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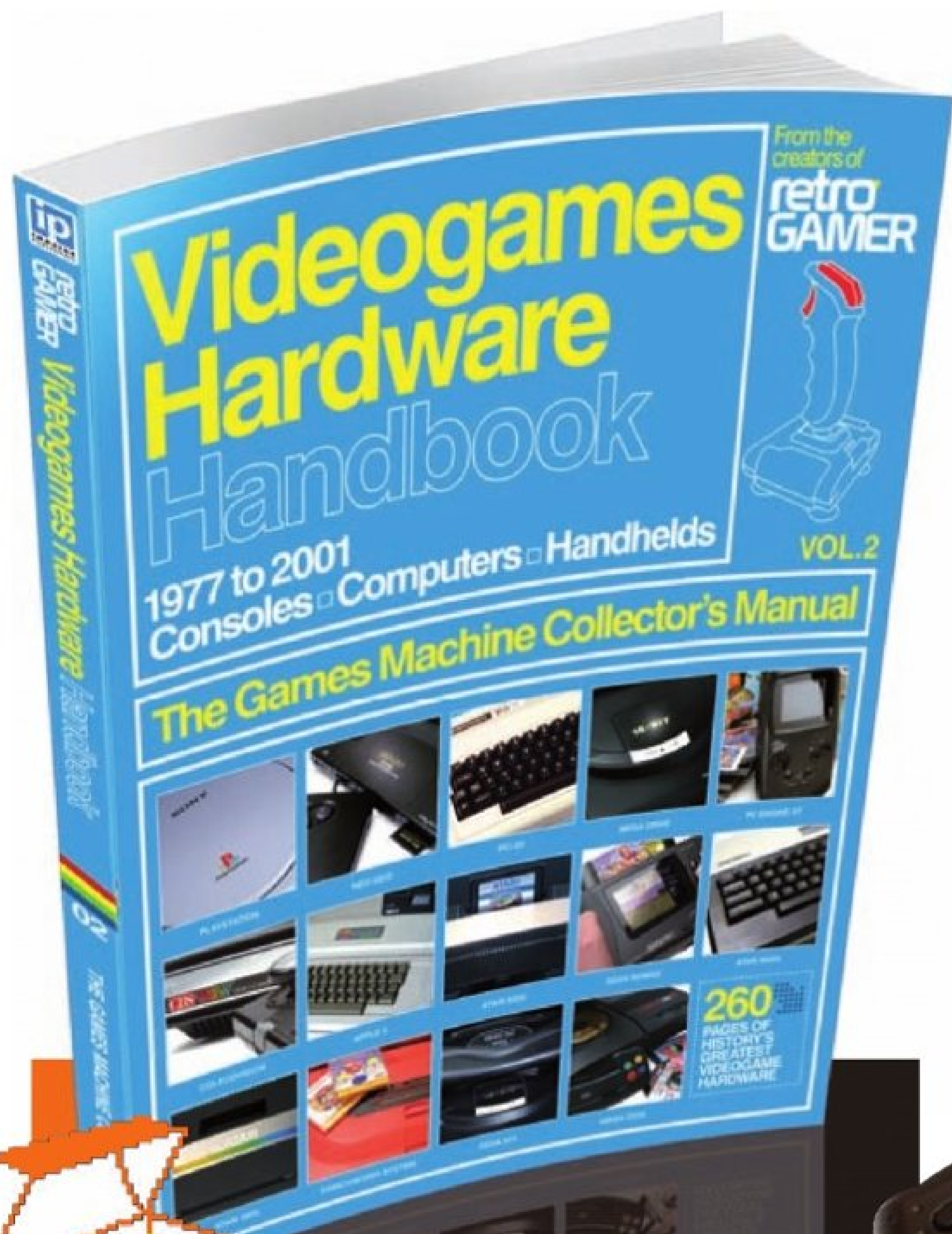
To submit your answer, simply email retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk with the subject line 'Boys Stuff' plus your name and address. The closing date for entries is 24 November 2010. Please be aware that answers must be submitted to the above email address only, and any left through the comments section of the website will be automatically disqualified.

This competition is open to residents of the United Kingdom and Ireland. Imagine Publishing has the right to substitute the prize for a similar item of equal or higher value. Employees of Imagine Publishing (including freelancers), their relatives, or any agents are not eligible to enter. The editor's decision is final, and no correspondence will be entered into. Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash. Full terms and conditions are available upon request.

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THE Vault

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST



Amstrad CPC464 hoodie

- **RRP:** £29.99
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

Let's face it, the Amstrad CPC was ahead of its time. All the cool kids had one, it featured some stunning conversions and made the Commodore 64 and Spectrum look absolutely rubbish in comparison. For some reason, though, history dictates that the other two machines were far better and much popular. So here's your chance to change history. Buy this hoodie for your friends and loved ones. When people see you wearing it in the street they'll instantly assume that it was the most popular 8-bit system of all time. And thus history will be changed for the better.





TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Hardware Handbook

- **RRP:** £9.99 (plus postage)
- **Buy it from:** www.imagineshop.co.uk

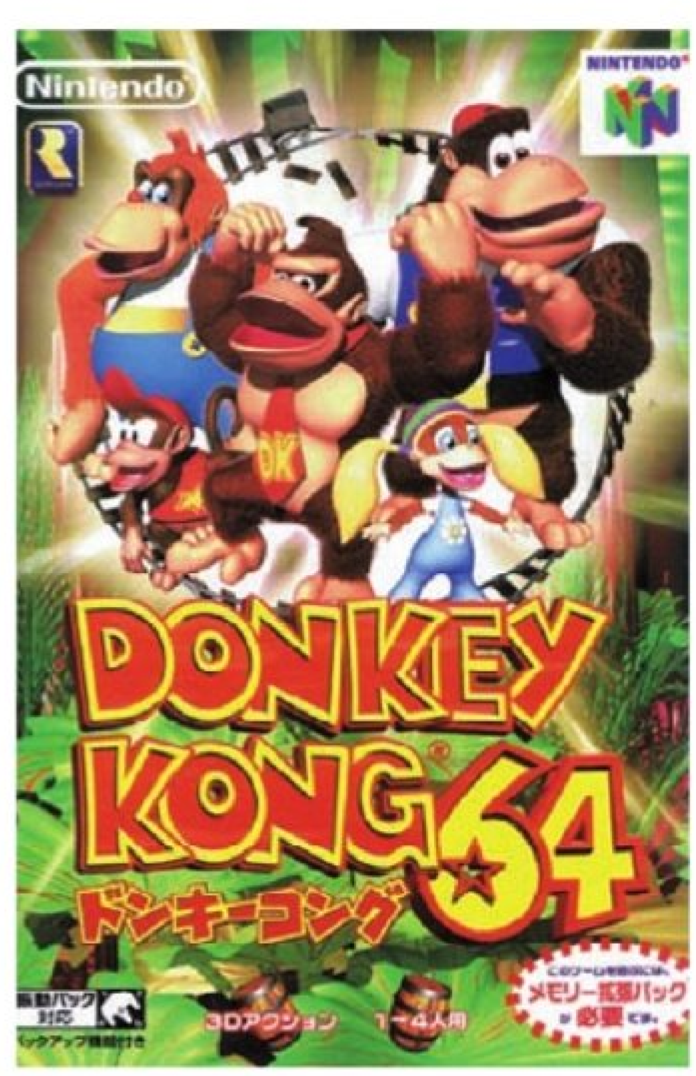
If you treated yourself to one of our awesome Retro Gamer mugs last month, then you're probably looking for something to read as you're drinking from it. So allow us to introduce the quite frankly awesome second edition of our new hardware series. This delightful tome isn't just an incredibly bright blue that makes the skies of Sega look bland and lifeless, it's also jam-packed with exhaustive coverage on some of gaming's greatest (and most obscure) games machines.

Want to learn about SNK's Neo Geo AES? Ever wondered what made the PC Engine GT tick? All the information is right here, making this an essential read for anyone interested in classic gaming systems. This 256-page tome is an amazing read, covers over 28 systems and is the perfect present for Christmas and all for an astonishingly low £9.99. Don't miss it.

Streets Of Rage Mega Drive console

- **RRP:** £29.99
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

We've always enjoyed Blaze's handheld systems, but this new release baffles us somewhat. Despite featuring two *Streets Of Rage* games, the best part of the series (number 2, in case you were wondering) isn't actually included. Sound emulation is also rather bizarre, often sounding extremely distorted (although the quality was much better through speakers). There's certainly a nice range of games – although many of them have been seen countless times before – but this isn't the best iteration of Blaze's system.



Donkey Kong 64

- **RRP:** £14.99
- **Buy it from:** www.genkivideogames.com

We're beginning to learn that if you want a consistent reliable service when buying import games then you should either use an excellent forum like ntsc-uk, or a site like Genki Video Games. The Japan-based supplier has hundreds of different games for a large variety of classic consoles and goes to great pains to explain the condition of each and every item that's sold. Check it out if you're looking for some games and love your Japanese text.



Retro Duo game system

■ **RRP:**: $49.99 (approx £30)

■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Want a SNES and NES but don't have the space for two consoles? Then why not invest in this funky device? This handy little games system will play US NES and Super NES games, is sturdily built and even uses original SNES pads. It even plays a decent number of Japanese games. It's obviously no substitute for the real deal and the lack of a PAL option is a pain, but this remains a solid alternative and is a great deal cheaper than the real thing.

Donkey Kong DS RC toy

■ **RRP:** £9.99

■ **Buy it from:** www.rewind-gaming.co.uk

As you might have guessed we're become rather enamoured with *Donkey Kong* this month. So much so in fact that we've set up an elaborate racetrack around the **Retro Gamer** pod that consists of a track made from old issues of the magazine and papier-mâché (also made from old issues of the mag). While we were initially concerned that this RC version of Donkey Kong lacks the grip and overall top speed of his videogame counterpart, we still had great fun ramming Mario and Yoshi into a papier-mâché replication of **Retro Gamer** towers. Hours of fun for everyone.



Super Mario Crystal Maze game

■ **RRP:** $39.99

■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Remember the awesome Screwball Scramble where you guided a marble through a variety of different obstacles? Well here's the officially endorsed *Mario* version. All right, so it's not actually as good as Screwball Scramble, because all you're doing is guiding your balls around a maze as quickly as possible, but it's still a lot of fun and the nippers are bound to enjoy it. And this time the Princess *isn't* in another castle.



TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



01 A Miserable Little Pile Of Secrets T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Buy it from:** meatbun.us/store/



02 Amstrad
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Sonic Power-ups
■ **RRP:** $14.95 (approx £10)
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

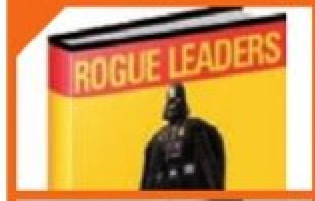


04 Coexist T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
■ **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Dizzy
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
■ **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988 ■ **RRP:** $55 (approx £34)
■ **Author:** Brett Weiss
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



03 Racing The Beam
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Publisher:** MIT Press
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
■ **RRP:** £22.14
■ **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
■ **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
■ **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Mega Drive Card Holder
■ **RRP:** $34.10 (approx £21)
■ **Manufacturer:** Banpresto
■ **Buy it from:** www.strapya-world.com



02 Grow Your Own Moai Statue (aka DOH)
■ **RRP:** $5.99 (£4)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



03 Retro Videogame Propaganda Posters
■ **RRP:** £33 ■ **Manufacturer:** Steven Thomas ■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



04 Headcrab Plushie
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Namco Dioramas
■ **RRP:** £5
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com

*A MOMENT WITH...

Jim Bagley



Every issue we put an industry veteran in the hotseat. This month, Darran Jones talks to Jim Bagley

Who is Jim Bagley?

Jim Bagley has been working in the games industry for 22 years. He made his name on the Spectrum with titles such as *Throne Of Fire*, moved to Ocean Software and Special FX and has created games for everything from the ZX80 to the PlayStation.

If you could recommend one of your games for readers to play, what would it be and why?

It would have to be *Gutz* on the Spectrum, as it was the first game at Special FX where I got to work alongside Joffa Smith and use his fast scroller routine.

What is your proudest achievement in life?

My proudest achievement in life is having two beautiful little girls, and getting married to my gorgeous wife! I've had so many proud moments working in the games industry, but my proudest in work has been getting great feedback over the years from many people around the world.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?

Dealing with artists that couldn't stay within the constraints of the platform. I remember working on a Mega Drive soccer game and getting the artist to remember to draw the players in 15 colours and one transparency colour, but they kept coming back at 16 colours and one for transparency. It's very frustrating, especially with tight deadlines.

Which other industry veteran do you must admire and why?

Programming-wise, Joffa Smith. He taught me a few tricks of the trade and was a great bloke with it. Design-wise, Shigeru Miyamoto. In my mind he is a total genius.

How would you like your games to be remembered?

I'm quite happy and lucky with the fact that my games are still remembered 20+ years on, some of which are still being sold to this day, which is a huge compliment.

What one game do you wish you had made and why?

3D Monster Maze by Malcolm Evans. I was amazed at how he used the system to its full potential, and took you away into this new 3D world. I even made a remake a few years back on a PIC micro-controller chip, and again for the Parallax Propeller.

What opportunities has making games given you?

The most important opportunity for me has been working from home so that I can be here to see my little girls grow up. So even when the workload has been busy, I've at least been with them, and not away in an office.



» [Spectrum] Jim has worked on some impressive Spectrum conversions including *Cabal*, *Midnight Resistance* and *Road Runner*.



What's your best memory of being in the games industry?

I have many, many best moments, but my favourite has to be the recognition that I still receive from the retro-gaming community. It's ace to still be appreciated for the games that I wrote over 20 years ago.

Can you share an interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?

One of the most amusing things that happened was when we were finishing *Cabal*. I had to go to Ablex to finish it off, but I couldn't drive, so Ivan Davies offered to take me. We headed out to Ablex and got booked into the B&B. We when returned we discovered that the only room left was the bridal suite, which thankfully had an additional single bed, as well as the master bed with a swing at one end. So it turns out that the first time I stayed in a bridal suite was with a guy I worked with.

How has the industry changed over the last 20 years?

The industry as a whole is unrecognisable to what it was 20 years ago. Obviously the move from 2D to 3D is the most significant, and the speed that technology has advanced has played a major role in how games are now developed. It's gone from a small team to huge ones, with multi-million pound investments. Thanks to mobile gaming, though, it is possible to create small games again, and as games can be downloaded it means the team doing the work get a better deal, instead of all the money going back to the investors. *



» [Spectrum] The film wasn't a hit, but Jim managed to turn *Hudson Hawk* into a surprisingly awesome little platformer.



12 November – 9 December

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



14 November 2003

■ *Mario Kart Double Dash!!* gets its UK release on the Gamecube.



15 November 2001

■ The original Xbox console goes on sale for the first time. Those lucky Americans were the first to get a look.



16 November 2001

■ The GP32 handheld console is released by Game Park in Korea. It's great for open source developers and emulation fans.



18 November 2000

■ *Escape From Monkey Island*, the fourth in the point-and-click adventure series, is released in the UK on PC.



19 November 2010

■ Ubisoft rereleases its first three *Prince of Persia* games on the PS3 under a new Classics HD banner.



19 November 2010

■ Electronic Arts' *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit* is due for release in the UK on PS3 and Xbox 360.



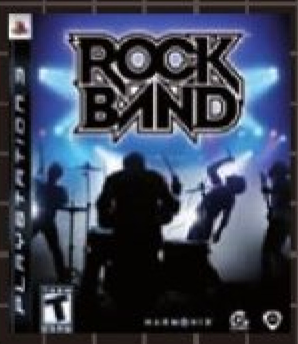
19 November 2006

■ The Nintendo Wii makes its debut in the USA. Japan was next in line, with its stock going on sale on 2 December.



18 November 2001

■ Nintendo's Gamecube console is released in America.



20 November 2007

■ The music videogame *Rock Band* is released on the PS3 and Xbox 360. Rock on!



21 November 1990

■ Nintendo's Super Famicom takes its first steps to global domination when released over in Japan.



21 November 2008

■ Midway Games releases *Mortal Kombat Vs DC Universe* in the UK on the PS3 and Xbox 360



22 November 1994

■ The Sega Saturn goes on sale for the first time anywhere. This time Japan gets the stock first.



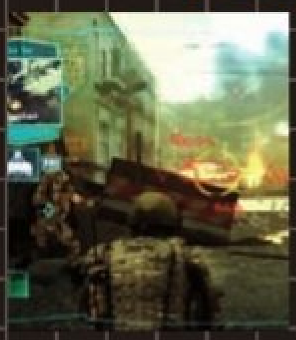
26 November 2004

■ *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent* arrives on the PS2 and Xbox. Sadly, it wasn't a patch on the original N64 *GoldenEye*…



24 November 2000

■ Sony's PlayStation 2 is finally released in the UK. About time too.



23 November 2001

■ Ubisoft releases *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon* on the PC in the UK.



23 November 1998

■ Nintendo's colour version of the Game Boy handheld console is released in Europe.



27 November 1998

■ The Sega Dreamcast is officially released in Japan. The UK release was a mere year away…



29 November 1972

■ Atari builds its first *Pong* arcade game.



1 December 1993

■ *Link's Awakening* is released on the Game Boy throughout Europe. It's Zelda's first appearance on the handheld.



09 Dec 2010

■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



» [Commodore 64] Ocean comes up trumps again with a superb conversion of the Taito coin-op arcade game.

» [Spectrum] Pat makes a special delivery to Mrs Goggins and empties his sack in time for lunch…



» [Spectrum] The Force is not quite as strong as in previous Domark outings. Blame it on the Ewoks…





THE LATEST NEWS FROM DECEMBER 1988

DECEMBER 1988 – Larry infected, Cascade restructures, Super Famicom spotted, Postman Pat in Alternative delivery, Ocean releases golden trio, Return Of The Domark while Rainbird trip out on Weird Dreams. Richard Burton dissolves, evolves and finds a new colour…

The big news from Japan was that Nintendo had unveiled a prototype 16-bit console that it was calling the Super Famicom, although no detailed specifications were forthcoming. Nintendo planned for the Super Famicom to be available in July 1989 although, in reality, it would debut in November. With the Mega Drive having been released in Japan in October, could Nintendo's new console make headway into Sega's domination after a year's head start?

Meanwhile, Sega informed the eager masses of UK gamers that the Mega Drive would be released here officially in late 1989. Games would be priced at £30 upwards, and existing Master System titles would be backwards compatible… but only with the Power Base Converter adaptor that could be purchased separately.

Feel-good story of the month must surely go to newspaper reports stating that pirated copies of Sierra On-Line's fruity game *Leisure Suit Larry In The Land Of The Lounge Lizards* had been freely distributed around City dealing rooms and were found to contain an aggressive virus, causing damage to their computer systems. Maybe the banking yuppies should have bought an original copy rather than blowing their substantial bonuses on a new panda-skin Filofax with built-in Cristal dispenser…

Cascade Games decided it was time to distance itself from those heady days with a corporate name change. The company split into three divisions encompassing games, business software and television work. The Artronic empire was born…

Unfortunately, after a handful of decidedly average games on the Spectrum and C64, including *DNA Warriors*, *Pogotron* and *Penalty Soccer*, Artronic's future was neither long nor fruitful.

Alternative proudly announced that it had splashed out on its first licensing deal. The petty cash tin must have been raided for this one as it veered away from Hollywood, instead plumping for Greendale. Yes, indeed: the *Postman Pat* game was coming.

The big three 8-bit computers would see a task-oriented affair that catered to gamers of all ages. It was standard budget gaming fodder, although it sold well enough to warrant two further sequels.

After much hype and advertising, Ocean finally released its second *Batman* game, *Batman: The Caped Crusader*, in time for Christmas. Would it be as good as Jon Ritman's isometric chart-topper from 1986?

Thankfully the talented fingertips of the late Joffa Smith worked wonders creating an excellent two-part arcade adventure with some beautiful comic book graphics. Available on the Spectrum, Amstrad and C64, all versions played superbly and sold handsomely.

Ocean's Christmas assault hadn't finished there, with arguably two better



» [NES] Finally, an 8-bit version of *Double Dragon* with decent gameplay after the C64, Spectrum and CPC efforts.



» [Spectrum] Two *Batman* games and two hits, so what next for Ocean? Hint: A game based on a bat-like superhero…

DECEMBER 1988 NEWS



» In an already tragedy filled month and just four days before Christmas, Lockerbie occurred…

December 1988 – not good, not good at all…

3 December started with the Minister of Health, Edwina Currie, infamously suggesting that most British eggs contain salmonella. Egg sales plummeted and the government was forced into a compensation package for farmers. Two weeks later, Currie resigned.

12 December saw 35 people die in the Clapham Junction rail disaster. Two passenger trains collided at 8am during rush hour, then shortly afterwards an empty train hit the wreckage, killing several survivors of the first crash.



» Curried eggs, anyone? Edwina suffers from a Major cock-up…

21 December – 270 people died after Pan Am Flight 103 crashed onto the town of Lockerbie. The flight took off from Heathrow, destined for New York. An hour later contact was lost, with reports that a plane had hit a residential area in Lockerbie.

It later transpired that a bomb had been detonated on the flight. After investigations, two Libyan men were arrested and charged with the planting of the device. One was found not guilty while the second man, Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed Al Megrahi, was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment.

offerings being readied for release. First up was the arcade coin-op conversion of shoot-'em-up *Operation Wolf*. It rated well across the 8 and 16-bit systems, although the 8-bit versions seemed to be more playable despite their graphical limitations.

Another arcade conversion, *RoboCop*, swept aside all challengers. It was a run-and-gun game that captured the essence of the movie well and translated it into an enjoyable game. Like *Operation Wolf*, it rated highly and again, the 8-bit conversions seemed to play better than the Amiga and Atari ST versions. *RoboCop* would come to dominate the software charts for the foreseeable future and, unsurprisingly, Ocean soon started lining up sequels.

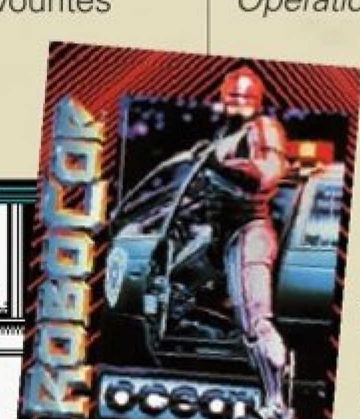
Domark continued its run of *Star Wars* games by revealing that *Return Of The Jedi* was finished and ready for release, and it was a very different animal to the first two games. Domark had done away with the vector graphics, instead going for an isometric-style scrolling game in which you had to avoid obstacles.

Sadly, that was about the strength of it. The levels featured familiar favourites like the Millennium Falcon, but the action was disappointingly similar throughout – avoid, dodge, avoid, shoot a bit and avoid some more. More disappointing was the lack of opportunity to stick a Lightsaber into an Ewok…

And from the mainstream world of licensed games and big name movies, Rainbird took us to the twisted world of *Weird Dreams*. With regular preview screenshots saturating the preview sections of the gaming press, Rainbird looked to be promising something very different.

The aim of the adventure was to wake yourself from a nightmarish dream you suffer while being operated on in hospital. If you do not solve the puzzles, you will not wake up. From there, the adventure goes into bizarre overdrive. Giant wasps, Dali-esque landscapes filled with floating fish, and starting the game inside a candy floss machine gives you an indication of where you're heading. Sadly, it proved too weird for many, who loved the graphics but loathed the game when it arrived.

Computer & Video Games caught a bumper haul of games this month. The Game of the Month award went to *Operation Wolf* (Ocean, C64), with *After Burner* (Activision, Spectrum), *SDI* (Activision, Atari ST), *Savage* (Firebird, Spectrum), *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer* (Audiogenic, C64), *International Karate +* (System 3, Atari ST), *Turbo Cup* (Loriciels, Atari ST), *Red Storm Rising* (MicroProse, C64), *Laser Squad* (Target Games, Spectrum), *Lancelot* (Mandarin/ Level 9, Amiga), *Golvellius: Valley Of Doom* (Compile, Master System), *Nintendo Soccer* (Nintendo, NES), *Rambo III* (Sega, Master System) and *Double Dragon* (Technos, NES) rounding up a comprehensive cross-section of the best Christmas releases.

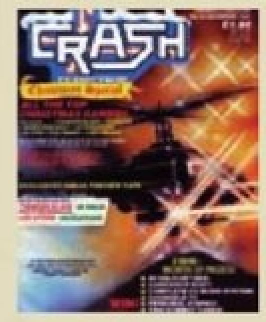




» [Spectrum] *RoboCop* proved to be a cash cow for Ocean as it became one of the bestselling games in the Spectrum's history.

THIS MONTH IN…

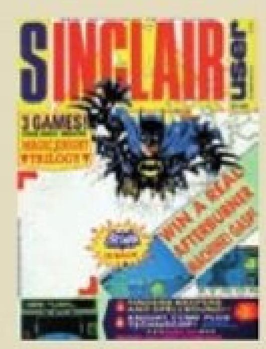
CRASH



The Christmas issue saw an array of programming royalty quizzed about their favourite games. *Knight Lore* was voted the most admired game, but what was the Stamper brothers' own game of choice? It was Artic's golden oldie *3D Combat Zone*.



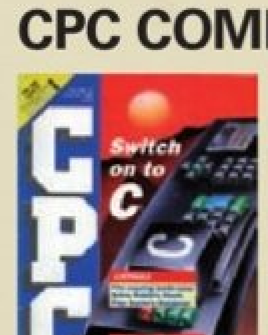
SINCLAIR USER



The irreverent Outlands feature had several snap reviews covering the VHS releases of *RoboCop* and *The Lost Boys*, a Kiss concert at Wembley, new Warhammer figures from Games Workshop and the latest Douglas Adams book. The fluffy comfort blanket of Eighties loveliness…



CPC COMPUTING



Having changed from *Computing With The Amstrad* to *CPC Computing*, Database Publications announced that the mag was to merge with *Amstrad Computer User*. Fittingly, the final game to receive its Golden Award was the sequel to *Game Over*.



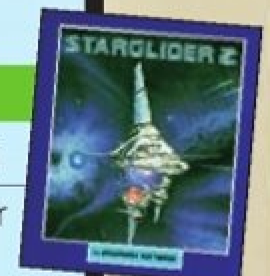
CHARTS

DEC 1988



SPECTRUM

1. Bomb Jack (Encore)
2. Joe Blade 2 (Players)
3. Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge (Ocean)
4. Tracksuit Manager (Goliath Games)
5. Gauntlet (Kixx)



ATARI ST

1. Starglider 2 (Rainbird)
2. STOS Games Creator (Mandarin)
3. Virus (Firebird)
4. Where Time Stood Still (Ocean)
5. Dungeon Master (Mirrorsoft)

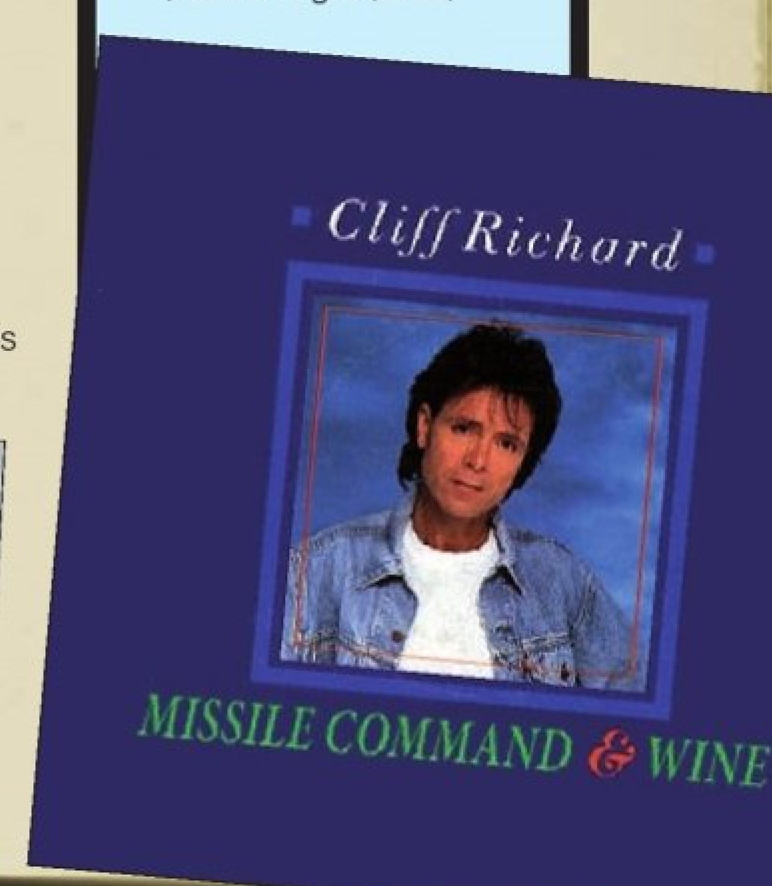


AMSTRAD

1. Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge (Ocean)
2. Advanced Pinball Simulator (Codemasters)
3. Kikstart 2 (Mastertronic)
4. Joe Blade 2 (Players)
5. Bomb Jack (Encore)

MUSIC

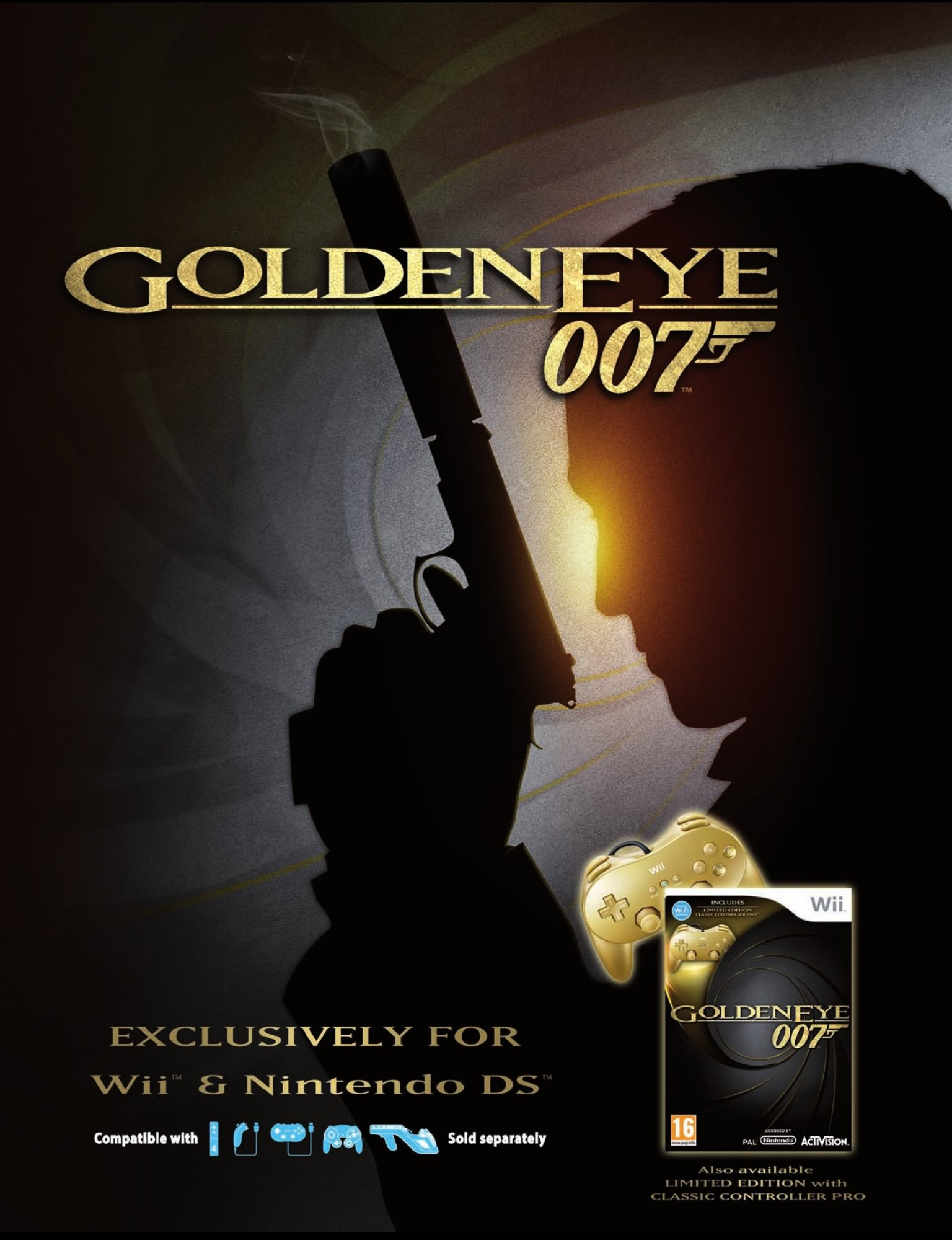
1. Mistletoe & Wine (Cliff Richard)
2. Especially For You (Kylie & Jason)
3. Suddenly (Angry Anderson)
4. Crackers International (Erasure)
5. Cat Among The Pigeons / Silent Night (Bros)









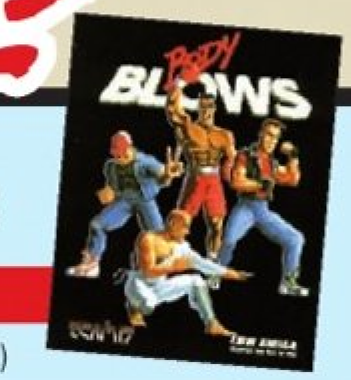

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BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Mega Drive] Sublime gaming with rotoscoped graphics put *Flashback* head and shoulders above its rivals.

CHARTS



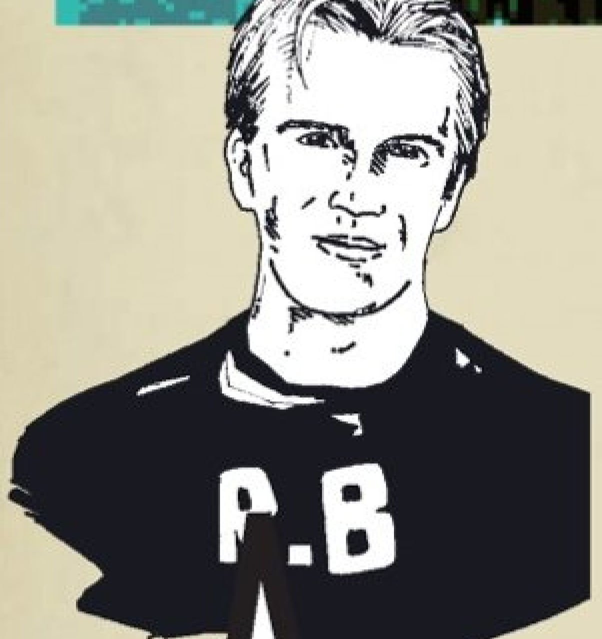
JUNE 1993

AMIGA

1 Body Blows (Team 17)
2 The Chaos Engine (Renegade)
3 Alien Breed: Special Edition (Team 17)
4 Lemmings 2: The Tribes (Psygnosis)
5 B17 Flying Fortress (MicroProse)

» [Amiga] Become a god with the power to create life. Obviously, mutating a cat and parsnip together was fun too…





JUNE 1993 – Gremlin gets Madness, Maxis gets life, Virgin gets animated, Terminator is back, Street Fighter II creates fights while new challengers go looking for one. Richard Burton goes kung-fu fighting and is as fast as lightning…

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1993

Gremlin Graphics' latest press releases detailed news of two new platform games that it was developing, and predictably one was a sequel to its hit game *Zool: Ninja Of The Nth Dimension*.

Zool 2 improved on the original colourful, sugar-filled world by employing better controls, a varied set of levels and the introduction of a new female character called Zooz. *Zool 2* would appear on the Amiga, CD32 and Atari Jaguar, doing well on all three systems.

Not so successful was the proposed platform game based on the tomfoolery of the chirpy ska band Madness. The game was to be called *Madness: House Of Fun* and would have presumably featured copious quantities of baggy trousers…

House Of Fun planned to introduce a new playable character called Nutz, while a bombardment of Madness tunes pummelled your eardrums throughout. Gremlin intended to release Mega Drive and Amiga versions, only to succeed in releasing neither. The game remains unreleased, although preview screenshots showed it to bear a remarkable resemblance to an earlier Gremlin Graphics Amiga game, *Harlequin*.

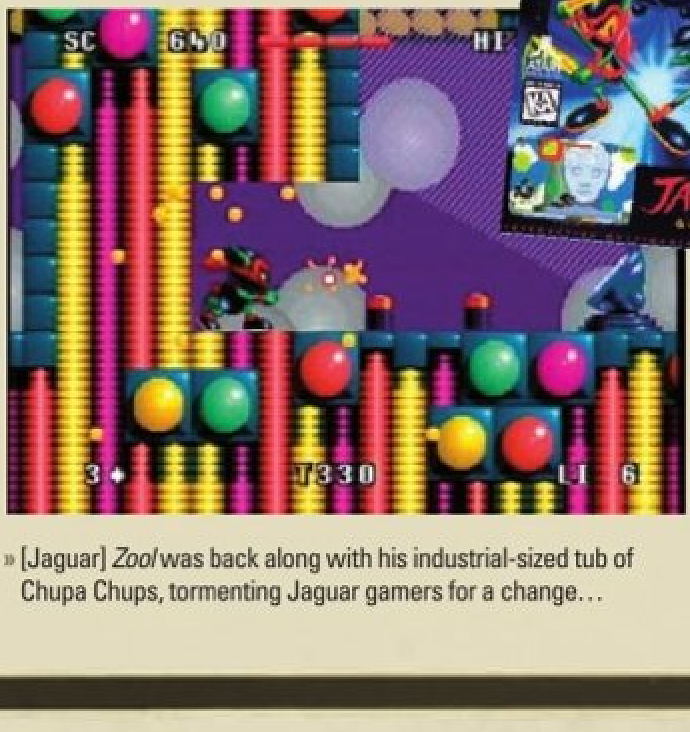
Maxis Software had news of its latest Sim offering, *SimLife: The Genetic Playground* for the Amiga. *SimLife* would allow you to create your own animals, plant life and ecosystems, and then watch to see how they live, evolve and die. You could also play god by fiddling around with the DNA of your creations.

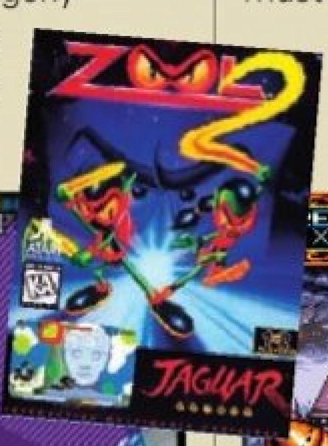
Although not one of Maxis's best games, and with the complex and involved nature of the game putting many people off investing time in creating a unique virtual environment, the game itself was still something of a refreshing change from the tidal wave of mind-numbing cutesy platform releases plaguing computers and consoles in recent months.

Speaking of which, Konami released details of its forthcoming and eagerly awaited platform game, *Rocket Knight Adventures* for the Mega Drive. A glance through the synopsis would soon get hearts sinking – yet more fluffiness with a sword-wielding possum wearing a rocket pack taking on a gang of pigs. Surely this was panning out to be a humungous pile of tosh?

Quite the opposite, as it happened. The main protagonist, Sparkster the possum, quickly converted those with an aversion to anthropomorphic lead characters. The game itself was a typical linear 2D platform game, but the quality really shone through in the design. Superb level planning with diversity throughout, combined with an abundance of fantastical graphics oozing clarity and quality, made *Rocket Knight Adventures* a must-have title on release. Just a pity it was only available on the Mega Drive.

Virgin's latest project, a platform game based on Disney's hit



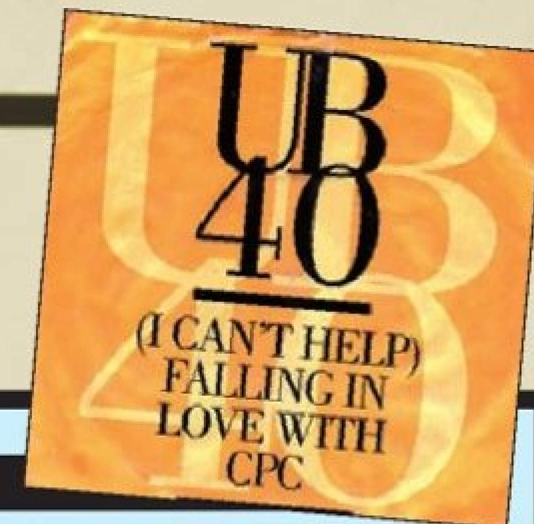


» [Jaguar] *Zool* was back along with his industrial-sized tub of Chupa Chups, tormenting Jaguar gamers for a change…



» [Mega Drive] Simply one of the best platform games involving a rocket-powered possum ever made…





MASTER SYSTEM

1 Sonic The Hedgehog 2 (Sega)
2 Lemmings (Sega)
3 Taz-Mania (Sega)
4 Speedball 2 (Image Works)
5 Mickey Mouse: Land Of Illusion (Sega)

SNES

1 Super Mario Kart (Nintendo)
2 Desert Strike (Electronic Arts)
3 PGA Tour Golf (Electronic Arts)
4 Super Mario Paint (Nintendo)
5 Looney Tunes: Road Runner (Sunsoft)

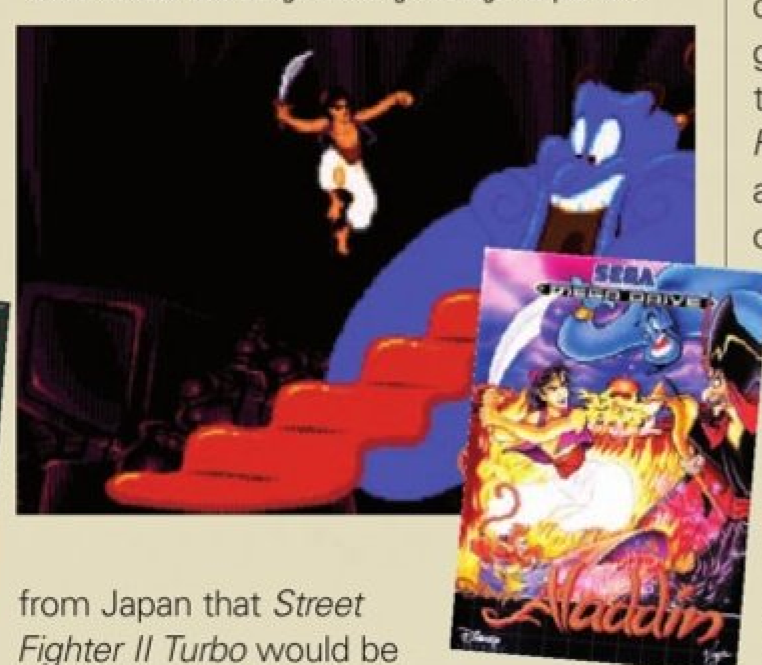
MUSIC

1 (I Can't Help) Falling In Love With You (UB40)
2 Dreams (Gabrielle)
3 What Is Love (Haddaway)
4 All That She Wants (Ace of Base)
5 Two Princes (Spin Doctors)

» [Neo Geo] Several SNK fighters were making the transition to the SNES and Mega Drive.



» [Mega Drive] Virgin re-creates Disney's *Aladdin* perfectly, with some creative level design including the magic carpet ride.



animated movie *Aladdin*, was nearing completion, and things boded well. Virgin was helped with the graphics by several Disney animators, to re-create that Disney feel. This was in no small part due to the Digicel process developed by the animation team at Virgin.

They took the animators' original drawings, converted and compressed the data, and used them in the game. This painstaking attention to detail paid off as the Mega Drive version sold extremely well, played splendidly and received good reviews aplenty. Further console releases of *Aladdin* naturally followed.

And still there was no let up in Virgin's news flow. For the Sega Mega-CD it would be updating its game based on *The Terminator*. It would also be releasing *Two Tribes: Populous II*, a sequel to the popular god game, on the Mega Drive and finally combining with Disney once again to create *The Jungle Book*.

From school yard to offices, the dispute between console owners continued with the most bloody of battlegrounds being who had the best *Street Fighter II* game. SNES owners were happy to poke fun at Mega Drive owners when *Street Fighter II* was only available on their machine. This month the tables were turned… and then turned a bit more…

Mega Drive fans were still basking in the golden light of the recent release of their own version of the game, the *Championship Edition*, which included playable bosses. Much flicking of Vs and tongue-poking ensued in the playground, leaving SNES owners quietly seething.

However, the upper hand was returned to SNES owners with the joyous news from Japan that *Street Fighter II Turbo* would be coming soon. A conversion of the new arcade game, it would be faster, also allow the bosses to be played and, more importantly, wouldn't be released on the Mega Drive. Bragging rights fully restored.

However, *SF II* might have another challenger in the near future with reports that the Neo Geo favourite *Fatal Fury 2* was going to be converted to the Mega Drive and SNES. SNK would once again develop, with Takara publishing the fighting game.

And there was to be more Neo Geo conversion fun with another *SF II*-styled game, *Art Of Fighting*, making the move to Sega and Nintendo consoles. *Art Of Fighting* was the first game to incorporate a camera zoom feature that closed in on the action whenever the players went toe-to-toe. As innovative as that sounded, *Art Of Fighting* turned out to be extraordinarily average.

In magazine land, *Super Play* thought that the best of its reviewing fodder on the SNES this month was *Pop'n TwinBee* (Konami), *The Lost Vikings* (Interplay), *Solstice II: Equinox* (Sony), *Nigel Mansell F1 Challenge* (Gremlin Graphics) and *Super Baseball 2020* (K Amusement), which all scored highly.

Sega Force was also grading its monthly stash of new arrivals, with the best of the best being *Krusty's Fun House* (Flying Edge, Game Gear), *Flashback* (US Gold/Delphine, Mega Drive), *Tiny Toon Adventures* (Konami, Mega Drive), *Cool Spot* (Virgin Games, Mega Drive), *Night Trap* (Sony, Mega-CD) and *Crash Test Dummies* (Game Gear).

JUNE 1993 NEWS



» Everyone loves a dinosaur. Everyone except the guy who got devoured by the T-rex on the toilet. He's not so keen…

27 June saw President Bill Clinton authorise a cruise missile attack on the Iraqi Intelligence Headquarters in Baghdad. This was in response to a failed assassination attempt on the former President, George HW Bush, during a visit to Kuwait. Two Iraqi men were questioned and confessed to driving a car bomb into Kuwait on the instruction of the Iraqi Secret Service.

9 June brought with it the worldwide premiere of the must-see movie of 1993, *Jurassic Park*. Written by Michael Crichton and directed by Steven Spielberg, it was the story of an island filled with cloned dinosaurs, which suffers a catastrophic power failure, allowing said prehistoric beasts to go on the rampage and chow down on anything that moved. Great special effects made for believable dinos.

More cinematic goodness had arrived on 4 June in the form of *Falling Down*. Michael Douglas's character begins to see the injustice in society and starts to take matters into his own hands, lashing out in violent outbursts involving guns and the odd rocket launcher.

On 7 June, Prince changed his name to the symbol used on his 1992 album cover. Coincidentally, The Artist Formerly Known As Prince suddenly found his record sales deteriorating and his reputation take a pounding from critics.

THIS MONTH IN…

AMIGA POWER



Domark's *International Rugby Challenge* was on the end of a scathing review from **RG**'s own Stuart Campbell. With a score of 2%, Mr C laid into it by rating the attachment of electrodes to your genitals as being not as bad as said game.



SUPER PLAY



SNES magazine *Super Play* interviewed Mark Lewis, the UK boss of Electronic Arts. He wasn't overly happy with Nintendo's licensing policy, which restricted EA's SNES output to 12 games a year, which had to be okayed by Nintendo.



THE ONE AMIGA



Yet another developer diary appeared in *The One*, detailing the development of *Alien Breed 2*. Martyn Brown was the diary keeper: "Tuesday 6 April: spent most of the day wandering around clutching our heads, swearing never to drink again."



Ghost Manor

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH THE 2600 GAME OF THE SAME NAME

#31



» TURBOGRAFX-16
» TURBO TECHNOLOGIES INC
» 1992

I have a deep-seated love of anything spooky, especially if it's kitsch and plastic like a ghost train or a plastic light-up skull or something.

I have often pondered this love of the otherworldly; my home shelves are stuffed with horror films, my shelves in my office adorned with spooky games and Halloween knick-knacks and my graphic design work reflects this cartoon creepy to the maximum – the only place it's doesn't show through is in my dress sense; I never was one for the crow jacket and angst. Anyway, whatever the cause of this obsession I thought 'Ey up! *Ghost Manor*, this sounds like just the job for me,' so on it went and off I went.

First thing that struck me in the peepers was the rather snazzy graphics on display, full-on spooky kookiness. The main character looks like a bit of freak with his gigantic cranium and A-brand T-shirt, but the sprites are big and bold and it shows that whatever team was responsible for the graphics were passionate about their creation. Sadly, that is where the goodness ends.

Trying to get to the top of the first few stages (after grabbing the keys) can at first be a total pain in the keister, as 90 per cent of the platforms are set up in a sort of snakes and ladders format. You climb for an age only to jump onto the wrong platform, and next thing you're sliding all the way back to the beginning of the level. This is infuriating to say the least until you work out that in the first level you can ride a ghoul all the way back to the top. The second level is a bit more difficult, but you can make it with the aid of some armour-plated patience and some big green claws. The third level, inside the titular Ghost Manor, has none of the slip-'n'-slide aggro of its predecessors but has its own ways of annoying you that comes in the form of running out of power-ups and having no choice but to get killed to go back and chance it all over again.

This is pretty much the tune that *Ghost Manor* plays to – every level seems to have bloody great flaws and as such it makes for an infuriating experience that could have been so easily remedied with a bit of tweaking and more thought.

You can play it through to its skull-riding finale with plenty of fortitude, but it will let you down time and again. Despite some tasty elements *Ghost Manor* was nothing but a wasted journey for me and a wasted opportunity for the developers. *



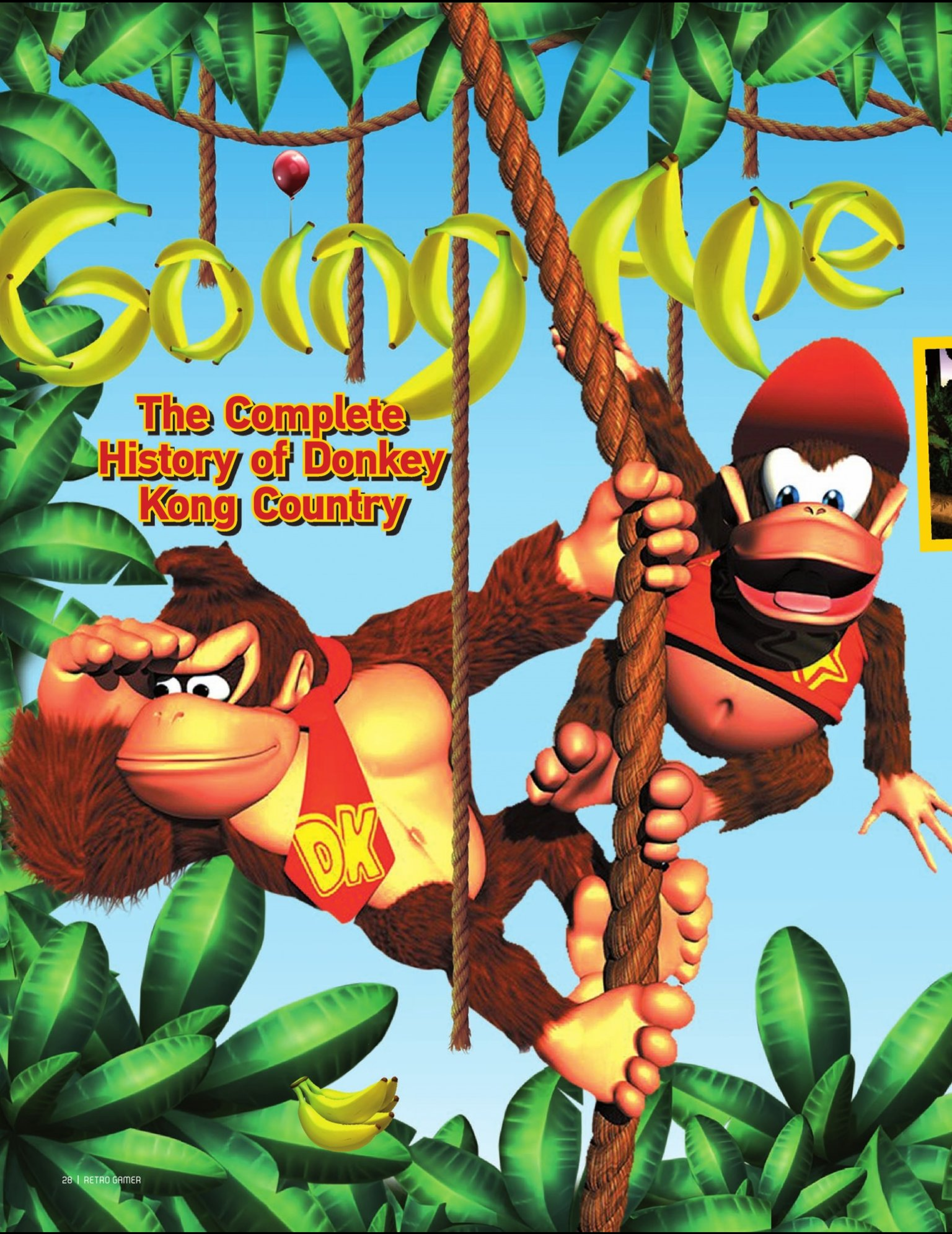
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» **LOCATION:** NORTHWEST, UK
» **OCCUPATION:** GRAPHIC DESIGNER
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** MASTER SYSTEM

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Going Ape

The Complete History of Donkey Kong Country



To mark the return of Donkey Kong Country, we take a look back at the history behind Nintendo's second most popular platform series, and speak to some of the people responsible for putting its first megastar back in the spotlight



It seems strange to begin this tale on the subject of fighting games, but, weirdly enough, this is where *Donkey Kong Country*'s origins can be traced. In the early Nineties the gaming world was going a bit mental over fighting games, a trend largely spurred on by the popularity and competition of two games in particular: Capcom's insanely popular *Street Fighter II* and Midway's censor-baiting gore fest, *Mortal Kombat*. While *Street Fighter II* was unquestionably the more seminal and better game, *Mortal Kombat*'s popularity and attention-grabbing digitised visuals brought about an interesting trend in the way many game studios began looking at graphics in 2D videogames. While games making use of digitised sprites had existed before *Mortal Kombat*, the game's arcade and console success made the style attractive, and some gamers and developers saw a movement away from colourful pixel-built sprites as where 2D games would be heading. But there was another trend that occurred at this time: many software houses outside Japan were also beginning to create graphics that were surpassing those being produced inside, particularly when it came to 3D graphics.

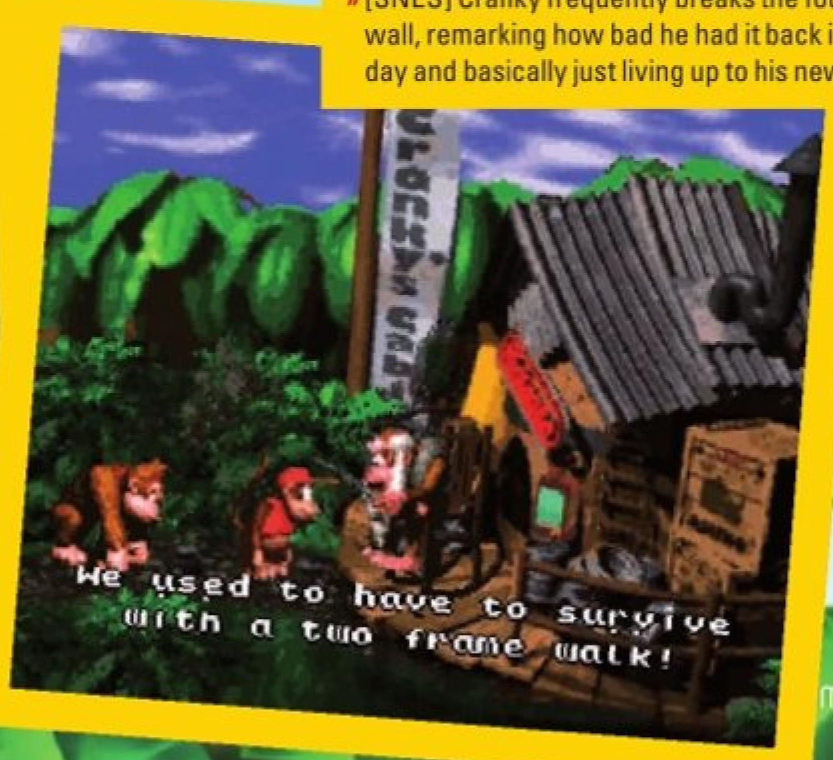
Rare was a developer known for its technical flair as much as its creativity. The Stamper brothers had a history of experimenting and toying with new technology and graphical techniques in their games, and, as legend tells it, in 1993 Tony Harman, then development manager at Nintendo of America, paid a visit to the studio and was shown some proprietary 3D technology that the brothers were working on. Still in its very early stages, the demonstration showed a simple 3D wireframe boxer rendered using a 3D modelling process that would later become known as ACM (Advanced Computer Modelling). Seeing the potential in the technology, Harman immediately contacted Nintendo in Japan and, armed with the backing of Nintendo top brass Shigeru Miyamoto and Genyo Takeda, persuaded its president Hiroshi Yamauchi to invest in a game that would make use of the technology.

At this time, *Donkey Kong*'s standing at Nintendo had taken a back seat. Cast in the shadow of NES stablemates Mario and Link, it seemed, ostensibly, like there was a sense of dispassion by Nintendo towards the character: following his arcade career, the ape had been given a handful of small appearances inside a handful of Nintendo games. But it was for this reason that DK was seen by Nintendo as the perfect candidate for this innovative new 3D project: the fact that the ape had fallen out of public consciousness, and had little in the way of a story – save that he was owned by Mario, maltreated by Mario, and later had a son… not by Mario – gave Nintendo the perfect opportunity to reinvent the character and release him back into the wild.

As chance would have it, another key relationship in this story had also begun forming in the background: this one between Nintendo and Silicon Graphics, Inc (SGI). Founded by James H Clark and Abbey Silverstone, SGI was set up to offer high-performance computer hardware and software solutions, and was steadily making inroads into the entertainment industry through special effects in movies such as *Jurassic Park* and *Terminator 2*. In the early Nineties, SGI was also looking at games and had been working behind the scenes on some new proprietary technology for use in games hardware, called Reality Immersion Technology. After a number of unsuccessful pitches to various developers, including Sega of America, SGI eventually found a partner in Nintendo, and the videogame giant consequently aligned itself with SGI, as well as MIPS technology, for the development of its next console, the N64, which at that time went by the development name of Project Reality. Both Rare and Nintendo invested in SGI technology, and millions of dollars worth of state-of-the-art Silicon Graphics super computers and workstations were delivered to the Twycross studio. Intended to be put to use on developing games for Project Reality, which they later were, the technology, while extremely difficult to convert to 16-bit, was nevertheless to be initially utilised for *Donkey Kong Country*.

While Rare and Nintendo's developer/publisher relationship spanned as far back as 1987, with the release of *Slalom* – the studio's first game for the Nintendo Entertainment System – Nintendo's handing over of *Donkey Kong* to Rare can be seen as a defining moment in the relationship between Japanese and Western game developers. Before then Nintendo had only ever entrusted its intellectual property to a handful of proven developers, and none were ever allowed to put any kind of indelible stamp onto one of its already established characters. Indeed, *DKC* would mark the biggest videogame collaboration ever between Nintendo and an external studio. It was a fact not lost on the Stampers, who quickly assigned a team of 12 people to work on the game, the biggest Rare had ever dedicated to a single project. With the team facing a tight deadline, as well as trying to get to grips with the new ACM





» [SNES] Cranky frequently breaks the fourth wall, remarking how bad he had it back in his day and basically just living up to his new name.

Family In The Tree



Donkey Kong Jr

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG JR

Depending on who it is you speak to and on which day of the week, Donkey Kong Jr did make it into the *Donkey Kong Country* series. Both companies have come out and said that *DKC*'s DK is, in fact, the grown-up son of the original Kong, Cranky. And *Donkey Kong 64* supports this assessment too. In other games, however, DK is referred to as Cranky's grandson. So we're confused.



Lanky Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG 64

Lanky is a distant cousin, which would make sense as he is, in fact, an orangutan. He's basically no legs and long arms – a physical attribute that comes into play during *Donkey Kong 64*, where he can perform a handstand to climb steep sections of levels.



Wrinkly Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2

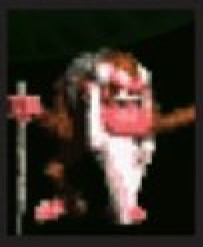
The matriarch of the Kong family, Wrinkly is the wife of Cranky and mother of Rare's DK. Her role was normally to offer hints and advice to the player. Rare would later kill her off in *DK64*, but still allowed her to grace us with her presence by appearing as a ghost in the game.



Donkey Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

The 16-bit generation brought a new generation of Donkey Kong. Sporting a trendy new tie, he would only appear in two of the three main *Donkey Kong Country* games. While there's still some confusion over the character's relationship with Cranky, he's definitely not the original Kong.



Cranky Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG

Cranky is the first DK, the one who shot to fame in 1981 and effectively set the barrel rolling for Nintendo's dominance. Cranky appears as a grumpy, wise old ape that reluctantly offers up advice and tips to the player. He also likes to break the fourth wall, commenting about how difficult he had it back in his day.



Chunky Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG 64

Chunky is the cousin of Dixie and Tiny, and elder brother of Chunky. His beefy frame and strength belie a softy at heart. Chunky can therefore be seen as the game's cowardly lion. He hates heights and shirks danger when he can. As well as *DK64*, Chunky also made a brief appearance in the GBA version of *DKC3*.



Swanky Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2

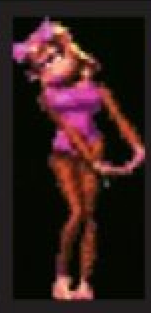
We're not entirely sure how Swanky fits into the family. In the *DKC* series he plays a suited game show host who asks players trivia questions about the series and rewards them with extra lives and items to use on their quest. To date, Swanky has never been a playable character.



Diddy Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

Beginning life as Donkey Kong Jr, Rare updated the character until Nintendo decided that it wanted him more in keeping with his infant look. Rare grew attached to its baseball capped hero and so reinvented him as Diddy Kong. A number of names were considered, including Diet Kong, DK Lite, Titchy Kong and Dinky Kong.



Candy Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

Candy was introduced into the series as a love interest for DK, and allowed players to save their progress by visiting her save point stalls. Candy has made a small number of appearances during the series, most notably in *DK64*, where she doled out the instruments for DK and his fellows, and in the GBA ports of the *DKC* sequels.



Funky Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

In *DKC* Funky was the guy you went to if you needed a short cut to levels you'd previously visited, and in *DK64* he went all militant, donning army fatigues and administering ammo and upgrades. We're unsure how he fits within the family, so we're going to label him as Swanky's estranged third cousin.



Tiny Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG 64

Tiny is the smallest member of the family. Sister to Dixie and cousin to Chunky and Kiddy Kong, Tiny in *DK64* could teleport and shrink in size. Tiny was one of the additional DK characters included in *DK Racing DS* and was confirmed to appear in *Donkey Kong Racing* before it got canned.



Kiddy Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 3

Kiddy is the infant cousin of Dixie and younger brother of Chunky Kong. Dressed in a sky blue romper suit, Kiddy was a power character who exhibited traits of Rare's original DK and DK Jr. Like his cousin, Kiddy was also planned to make an appearance as a racer in the GC follow-up to *Diddy Kong Racing*.



Dixie Kong

■ **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2

Dixie is Diddy's girlfriend, cousin to Kiddy and older sister of Tiny. She made her debut in *DKC2*, but took on a starring role for the third game. She has a long ponytail, which she can use as a propeller to hang in the air. She never appeared in *DK64*, but would later show up again in *Donkey Konga 2*.



» [SNES] *DKC2* opted for a swashbuckling pirate theme and introduced the piggyback move, which is why many fans consider it to be the best game in the franchise.

technology, progress had to move quickly. Especially as Nintendo, whose attentions would be concentrating on Project Reality, would have to leave most of the creative and design decisions to Rare, even permitting the studio to put its own stamp on the new 3D look of the character.

"I remember Miyamoto sent us lots of sketches for *Donkey Kong Country*. He had very definite thoughts about how Donkey Kong should look," remembers *DKC* programmer Brendan Gunn. "Tim [Stamper] had designed and rendered the image and Miyamoto had very distinct ideas about little aspects of it. They got incorporated but still left Rare to put their stamp on the character."

"[Miyamoto] was admirably hands-off, actually," adds Gregg Mayles, designer, and later producer, of the *DKC* series. "If that had been my character I'd have been looking into it every day. I mean literally he handed one of his characters over to us and we changed the look of it completely."

The original sketches by Miyamoto depicted a more cartoonish and cuddly version of DK than the one that would eventually appear in the finished game. Rare's input was to make him look leaner, more athletic, dynamic and younger looking – a look to dovetail perfectly with the fresh and innovative visual style. Once this new appearance was agreed, the next job was to decide on how best to animate the character. But quickly the team realised that 'monkey see, monkey do' wasn't really going to be practical for its game.

"Rare put its own stamp on the new 3D look of the character"

"We used the technology to model DK and it took a seemingly indefinite amount of time to get DK to move properly. And we tried everything. We visited the zoo to film real gorillas and have him move like a real gorilla, but they're very, very slow, and we needed a character that could run fast," says Mayles. "We had him running like a frog and then like a rabbit, but when we put the animation in it didn't look right. We went through about 15 different versions of how DK could move. In the end we based the run animation most closely on how a horse moves."

Considering *Donkey Kong*'s platform game roots and the popularity of the genre at the time, it came as no surprise when the brief that came down from Nintendo was to make *DKC* a side-scrolling platformer. But Mayles reveals that there may have been another, slightly more competitive, reason contributing to the design choice: "I believe the story, as it goes, was Nintendo had seen *Aladdin* on the Mega Drive, and the quality of the graphics and animations kind of blew everything away on the Super Nintendo. So after having seen our new graphics technology [Nintendo] said: 'We want you to make a game that's better than *Aladdin* using Donkey Kong.'"

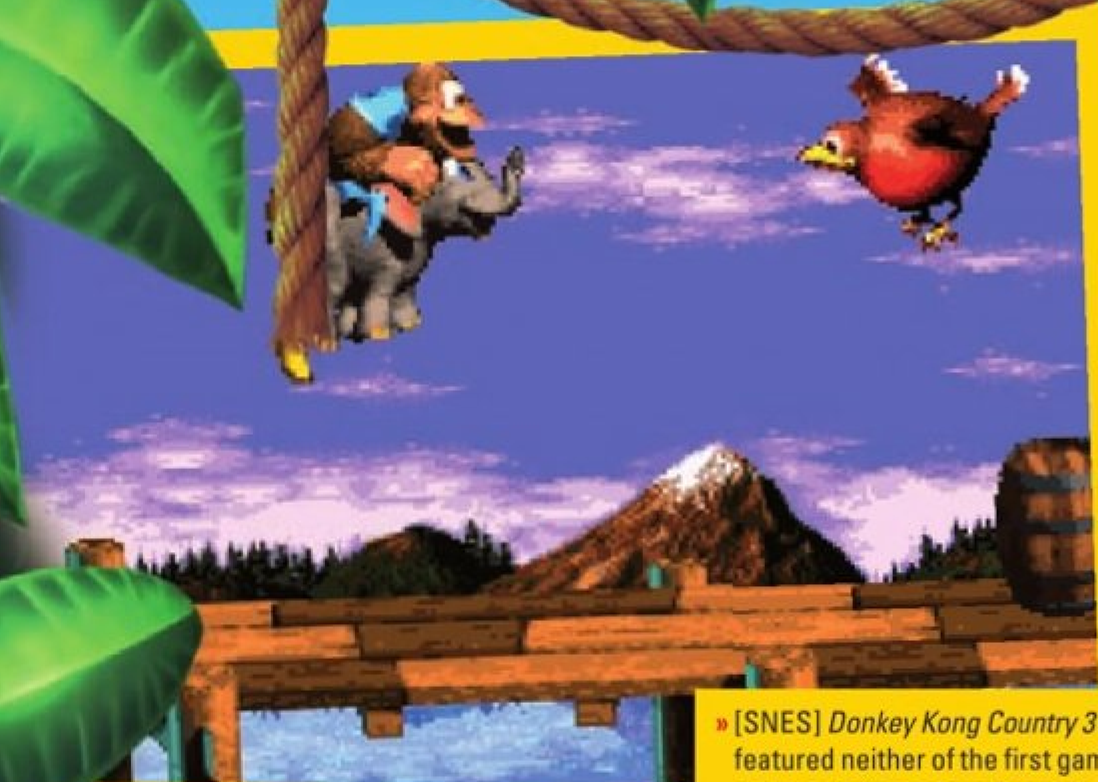
In the same way that Rare had the freedom to put its mark on Donkey Kong himself, so too could it on DK's newly expanded world. Until this point, Donkey Kong's universe had consisted of girders, ladders and barrels: hardly inspirational ingredients for an innovative new 3D platform game. Rare set about creating a lush new jungle world for players to explore, with diverse and colourful stages, meticulously designed and each offering something new for players to discover. A large number of the 40 stages in the game, such as Cannon Canyon, were designed in such a way that skilled players could run and jump through them at speed, first time and as efficiently as possible. But while the ACM process had its clear advantages when it came to character modelling and animation, problems arose when using the technology to create and store backgrounds.

"The backgrounds were the bane of the project," reveals Mayles. "The memory used by this single screen was more than a whole cartridge! The only way to have large backgrounds in that era was to ensure that elements of the background repeated. We wanted a background that looked natural and didn't appear to repeat, but achieving this was far from straightforward. We used a very slow method of cutting up elements by hand and then arranging them so that they repeated, but the key was to do it so the backgrounds retained as much of the 3D-modelled quality as possible, while trying to disguise the repeated elements."

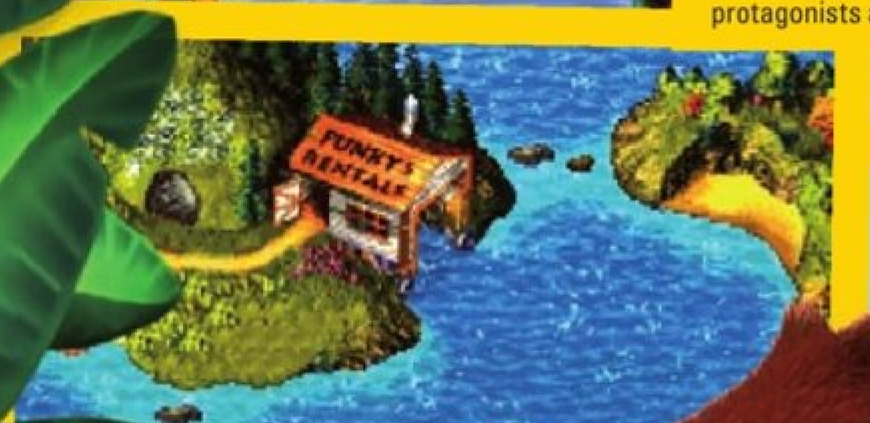
Not only did Rare introduce a younger and more agile-looking Donkey Kong to the series but also a plethora of new supporting characters too, including new enemies in the form of the Kremlings. Led by King K Rool, these crocodilian creatures are said to have been carried across from another game that Rare had in development at the time. But not all the new faces were hostile. Various animal steeds were added, designed as a clever way to imbue DK with enhanced abilities. Upon smashing crates scattered around the stages, players could release colourful sidekicks such as Enguarde the swordfish, Winky the »







» [SNES] *Donkey Kong Country 3* featured neither of the first game's protagonists as playable characters.





frog and Rambi the rhinoceros. Also, the first trickles of an extended family for DK appeared too. Rare introduced Cranky Kong, an older, belligerent version of the original 1981 DK; a surfer ape named Funky Kong; and a love interest in Candy Kong. All would play supporting roles in the game, administering tips or allowing players to save their progress. The most notable addition, though, was to come in the form of DK's sidekick and nephew, Diddy Kong. Like all the new faces, Diddy was a complete creation of Rare, and actually came about as a result of an early design decision by the studio. When it was decided that the screen should look as clean and clutter-free as possible, the team agreed that introducing a tagging system would be a good way to give the player an extra hit without needing to display a health bar. Rare then expanded the idea, imbuing both characters with their own unique traits: DK was stronger and could make short work of enemies, while Diddy was weaker but more agile. Interestingly, Rare later revealed that Diddy Kong had started life in the game as an update of Donkey Kong Jr, DK's son. However, Nintendo would only grant Rare the permission to use the character if he was made to look more like his original infant look. Feeling that its hip new character fitted perfectly into the game, a compromise was made: Rare would rename the character and Nintendo would adopt its ape.

While we're on the subject of characters, even to this day there remains an element of confusion as to the true dynastic background of Rare's DK. As we've already mentioned, the DK who appears in *DKC* isn't the original character but instead a descendant of Nintendo's ape. However, uncertainty remains as to whether the DK in the game is the grandson or the son of Cranky. But don't feel upset if you're confused, as even Rare and Nintendo forget at times. In the past both companies have come out and said that Rare's DK is the son of Cranky. For evidence of this, when a question regarding the relationship of the characters appeared on Rare's Scribes, the section of the studio's website where it answers questions about its games, the response that came back was: "As far as I know, 'our' DK is the son of Cranky, which does indeed make him the original DK Jr all grown up. So if you see Cranky referred to as DK's granddad anywhere, just cover your eyes and hum loudly until it goes away."

Conversely, all other evidence seems to point to Rare's DK being the grandson of Cranky. Not only is he referred to as such in the *DKC* games, but Solid Snake and Otacon would later corroborate the relationship in *Super Smash Bros Brawl*, during a codec chat that flashes up whenever Snake faces DK. How these two would come to know definitively is anyone's guess.

"Many assumed that DKC was running on Project Reality"

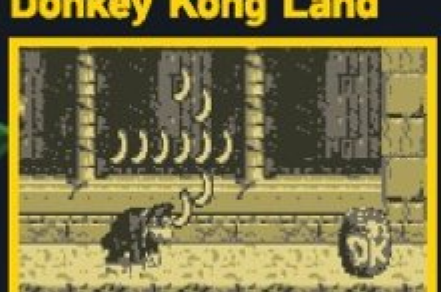
Once Rare had finished an early version of *Donkey Kong Country*, the time had come to visit Nintendo's headquarters in Kyoto and present the game. Following that meeting a few tweaks were made to the game, and *DKC* was finally ready to be formally unveiled to the world. The game was first shown off to the gaming press during the 1994 Shoshinkai (Space World) gaming expo in Japan, and attendees that year were left shocked upon seeing the dazzling 3D ACM visuals in action, as many had assumed that *Donkey Kong Country* was a next-gen project running from Project Reality tech, and they were duly stunned when the penny finally dropped.

As a result of the game's innovative 3D visuals, anticipation for it was understandably seismic. In fact, when *DKC* finally saw release in the months leading up to Christmas 1994, around the same time that Sony would launch

Mini Lands Of The Kongs

We give you a complete rundown of all the portable DKC games

Donkey Kong Land

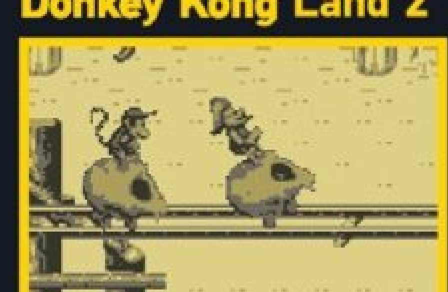


■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1995

■ **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY

Donkey Kong Land is a new adventure rather than a port of the SNES game, designed with the Game Boy's limitations in mind. As such, only one hero appears on the screen at a time, and the game comprised **four entire**ly new stages, and some new enemies too.

Donkey Kong Land 2

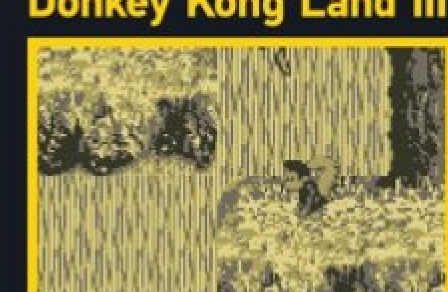


■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1996

■ **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY

More of a conversion than a continuation of its SNES counterpart, *Donkey Kong Land 2* featured the same story as the 16-bit version, but shortened the levels to take into consideration the limitations of the host platform.

Donkey Kong Land III

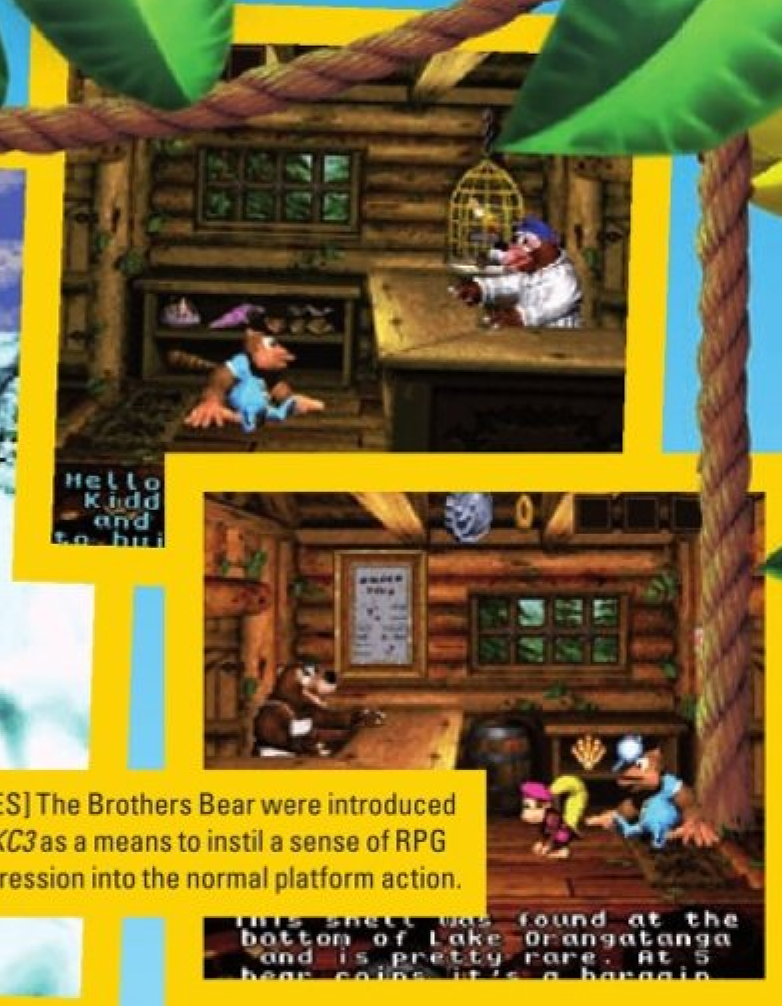


■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1997

■ **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY

Like previous games, *DKL III* is a loose port of the SNES game. Widely viewed as the best of the three *Land* titles, this one tweaked the plot of *DKC3*, as now Dixie and Kiddy were on a race to find the Lost World. It was also the only instalment to receive a Game Boy Color update.





» [SNES] The Brothers Bear were introduced in *DKC3* as a means to instil a sense of RPG progression into the normal platform action.

its PlayStation in Japan, within six weeks of being on sale the game had sold a staggering 6 million copies, earning Nintendo around $400 million in revenue.

With its popularity further fuelled by praise from everyone who played it, the game succeeded in protracting the commercial life of the Super Nintendo and played a key role in helping Nintendo to defend its market share during the delayed release of the Nintendo 64. Owing to *DKC*'s success, the relationship between Rare and Nintendo became stronger than ever, and this would conclude with Nintendo purchasing a 25 per cent stake in the studio in 1995. This would mark the first time Nintendo ever invested in an overseas developer.

Given *DKC*'s success, Rare quickly got to work on a sequel, and *Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest* was released into stores in Christmas 1995. While initial screenshots had many thinking the sequel would be simply more of the same *Donkey Kong Country* action of before, upon playing the games fans soon realised that it was a slightly different style of game.

This time DK was out of the frame. Kidnapped by Kaptain K Rool – now demoted from king after the first game – the sequel, in some respects, could almost be described as a side-scrolling retelling of *Donkey Kong Jr*, with Diddy promoted to the main hero and having to battling through the Kremlings' pirate-themed home world, Crocodile Isle, to rescue his uncle. In addition to introducing Diddy's girlfriend Dixie to fill the gap left by DK's abduction, several new Kongs were also added to the game. This included Wrinkly Kong, wife of Cranky; and Swanky Kong, a sharp-suited game show host who asked players trivia questions in quiz show-style mini-games.



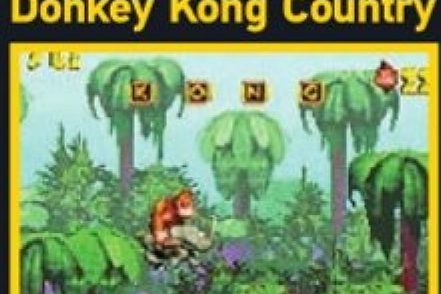
Donkey Kong Country 2 altered a number of elements from the original game. This time the apes could again enlist the help of various 'animal helpers', and not only were new ones added but this time the apes could oddly morph into them with the aid of special barrels – perhaps Rare had stumbled on a way to reuse some of those earlier DK animations. The tagging system was also greatly expanded, with both heroes able to perform a new piggyback move. With a quick tap of the Y button, one character could pick up the other, carry them on their back, and then throw them to attack enemies and reach otherwise inaccessible areas.

To complement this brand new feature, *DKC2* also had a far greater emphasis on exploration, now tasking players with obtaining special DK Coins through the locating of warp barrels that would whisk Diddy and Dixie to hidden stages in the game. Given the fast turnaround of the sequel, it's plausible that this mechanic might have been introduced as a measure to help save development time. Remember that, previously, many of the stages in *DKC* were designed to flow and be completed first time, a method that required meticulous design to get to work successfully. This style was far less prominent in *DKC2*, so perhaps by slowing its pace down and adding a new onus on exploration, Rare was able to design levels more efficiently.

Considering the popularity of the series at the time, and the anticipation of a sequel, *DKC2* became another hit for the Super Nintendo. And though it sold little over half the number of copies of the original, it still fell well inside the top ten bestselling games released for the console, such was the monumental success of the first game.

1996 would mark the final *DKC* release for the Super Nintendo. Released with the wordy title of *Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!*, *DKC3* retained the core platforming action that fans had become familiar with but introduced a subtle RPG twist. With both Diddy and Donkey now kidnapped by the Kremlings, it was down to Dixie to step up and take action, this time accompanied by her infant cousin, Kiddy Kong. Kiddy was designed as a giant infant gorilla dressed in a romper suit with similar »

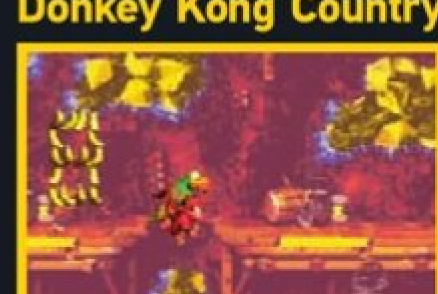
Donkey Kong Country



YEAR RELEASED: 2000
SYSTEM: GBC, GBA

Released for the Game Boy Color, this version added new stages, new mini-games and also a time trial mode. The GBC version featured different music, and both allowed players to save at any point. The GBA port also came with a multiplayer mode.

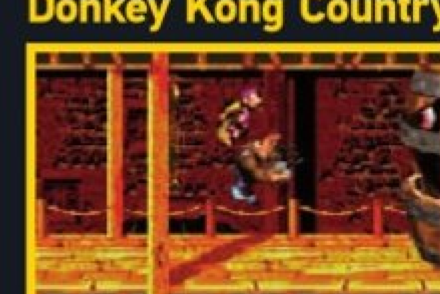
Donkey Kong Country 2



YEAR RELEASED: 2004
SYSTEM: GBA

This is another decent conversion, and while the visual fidelity is sacrificed to squeeze the game onto the handheld, Rare at least tried to compensate fans by packing this portable iteration with new mini-games, as well as Diddy's Dash: a multiplayer time trial mode.

Donkey Kong Country 3



YEAR RELEASED: 2005
SYSTEM: GBA

DKC3 was a faithful conversion. This time Rare gave its port a new soundtrack, new mini-games, a cheat menu, a new world to explore and a new boss to fight. This is widely regarded as being the best of the *DKC* GBA ports.

The DKC Spin-offs

Donkey Konga

■ **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 2003

Developed by Namco and comprising three games – the third was only released in Japan – *Donkey Konga* was Nintendo's stab at the rhythm-action genre. Played using a GameCube pad that was spliced with a plastic set of bongos, players got to bang them in time to the beat of cheesy pop songs and familiar Nintendo game music.





Donkey Kong Jungle Beat

■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 2004

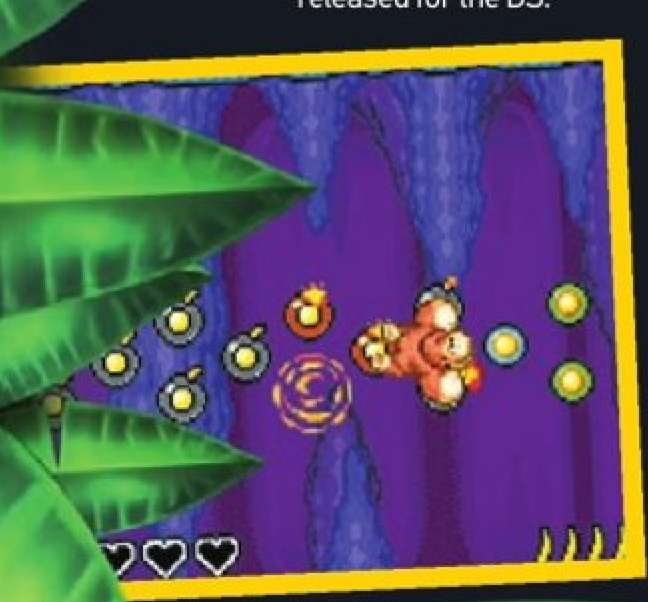
In a bid to eke further use out of the Bongo peripheral, Nintendo came up with one of the most surprisingly brilliant platform games on the GameCube. This wonderfully conceived on-rails platform score-attack game saw players steering Kong using the drum peripheral to reach the end of each stage with as many points as possible.



DK: King Of Swing

■ **DEVELOPER:** PAON
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 2005

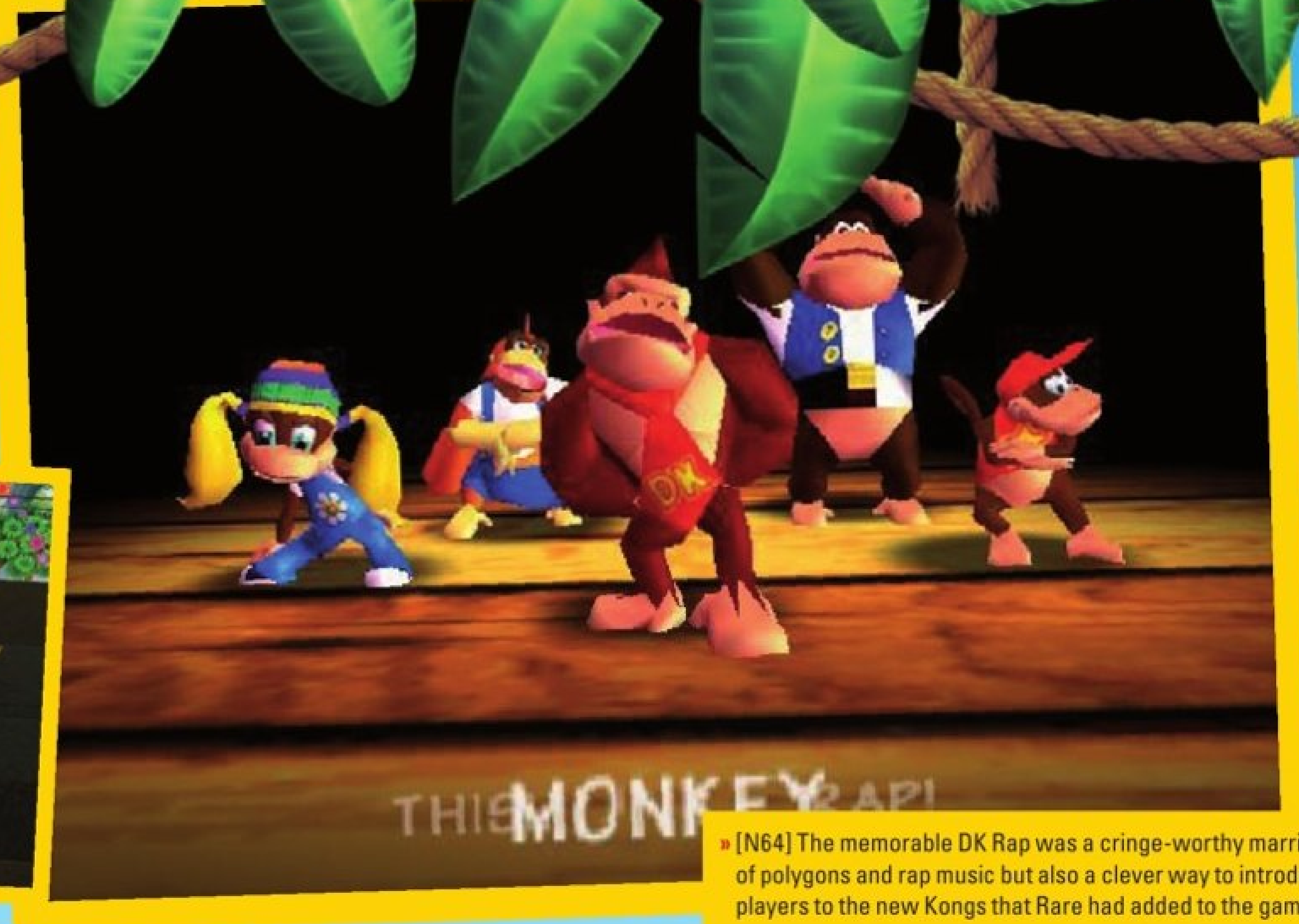
Said to be inspired by the early arcade and NES game *Clu Clu Land* and controlled using just the L and R buttons, *King Of Swing* found DK swinging from pegs to retrieve stolen medallions. With a series of mini-games, *King Of Swing* is a unique puzzle/platformer for the GBA. A fun sequel, *DK: Jungle Climber*, was released for the DS.



Donkey Kong Barrel Blast

■ **DEVELOPER:** PAON
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 2007

Though we never saw *Donkey Kong Racing*, Nintendo did release a second racing game starring the characters. Originally planned for the GameCube, development was eventually switched to the Wii instead. The game received so-so scores, with many reviewers calling its gameplay dull and plodding – never great for a racing game.



» [N64] The memorable DK Rap was a cringe-worthy marriage of polygons and rap music but also a clever way to introduce players to the new Kongs that Rare had added to the game.

attributes to DK, but with a look more in keeping with the classic DK Jr.

Essentially a 'power' character, Kiddy was able to throw Dixie farther than Diddy, and his weightiness allowed him to break through floors as well as skim across water. The setting was now the Northern Kremisphere, a diverse, sunny world made up of forests, waterfalls, mines and snow-capped hills, and the theme was biomechanical. As well as the obligatory coin and banana hunt, the characters were now given an inventory, and the game's non-linear hub map forced players to find the appropriate route through the world themselves, though by straying off the path it was possible to discover the occasional hidden area too. A loose RPG element was further incorporated through the introduction of a new family of characters known as the Brothers Bear, whom the apes could find and trade objects with in return for hints and assistance on their quest.

Released in October 1996, a few months after the N64's summer release in Japan, *Donkey Kong Country 3* went largely unnoticed. The impressive-looking ACM visuals, though undoubtedly the best of the trilogy, were now starting to lose their impact against the new wave of bona fide 3D titles, and with many gamers waving goodbye to their Super Nintendos and opening their arms to embrace the company's new console and *Mario 64*, it comes as little surprise that *DKC3* would sell the lowest number of copies in the *DKC* trilogy, and call time on the series' 16-bit days. But that wasn't to spell the end of Rare and DK by any stretch, as both studio and series turned their attentions to the N64. In this same year, the French-Canadian animation studio Nelvana released an animated series based on the franchise. Titled *Donkey Kong Country*, the show incorporated many of the characters that Rare had introduced into the series, including Candy Kong and Funky Kong, and also introduced a few that would never cross over into games, most notably Bluster Kong, a narcissistic ape who, in the series, battled DK for Candy Kong's affections. Airing in Europe, the US and Japan, where it was most popular, the series is famed for being one of the first animated television series to utilise CGI technology.

Though the next two *DK* games are not strictly *Donkey Kong Country* games, we felt that we couldn't examine the history of the series without mentioning them. The *DK* series' first N64 appearance came with the release of *Diddy Kong Racing* in 1997. It was a spin-off racing game that was loosely based on the series, and only two characters from the *DKC* universe actually made it into the game: Diddy, obviously, and a Kremling named Krunch – though Dixie and Tiny Kong would later be added to the game's DS roster. Beginning its life as a separate in-house N64 project at Rare, *Diddy Kong Racing* went through a number of different forms – previous to being *DKR* it was *RC Pro-Am 64*, a sequel to Rare's 1988 NES racer *RC Pro-Am*. When Nintendo offered Rare the opportunity to incorporate Diddy into the game, the chance was too good to let pass, and the game was ultimately tweaked once more. Diddy and Krunch were accompanied



» [Wii] From what we've seen of it so far it would appear that the decision to give *Donkey Kong Country Returns* to Retro was a sound one.



by other Rare characters, including Conker the squirrel in his videogame debut and Banjo the bear, and the game transformed into a kart racer. Through its inclusion of planes and hovercraft on top of the requisite karts, as well as its novel adventure mode, which helped it to feel more unique than other kart-racing games, *DKR* became another popular instalment and one of the most popular racing games released for the N64.

Released in 1999, and running on the same engine as *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Donkey Kong 64* was a sprawling 3D adventure. In fact, it was so big that the game was packed with the N64's 4MB Expansion Pak, and became one of the first games to utilise the memory plug-in. Replacing the polished ACM 3D models for polygonal ones while still retaining the look and spirit of the *DKC* games, Rare threw everything at the game, including an arena-based multiplayer mode and one of the most hilariously mad gaming intros ever cooked up, courtesy of the DK Rap. In addition, it also introduced three new playable Kongs to the series in the forms of Lanky, Chunky and Tiny, as well as tucking away playable versions of Ultimate's classic *Jetpac* and the original 1981 *Donkey Kong* coin-op by Nintendo. Assuming the role of Donkey Kong initially, players had to once again retrieve his banana horde and then free four family members from enslavement by King K Rool. Once freed, Kong's relatives then became controllable in the game and, like previous *DKC* games, each exhibited their own unique abilities. The main difference this time was that they were also armed with their own signature projectile weapon and musical instruments. *Donkey Kong 64* split opinion among many fans. Some loved the scale and size of the game, while others found the heavy amount of item-collecting and exploration to be a little tedious and excessive. Nevertheless, the title still received acclaim and even went on to be awarded E3 Game Critics Award for Best Platform Game in 1999, and still remains Donkey Kong's biggest adventure to date.

"Donkey Kong 64 split opinion among many fans"

Following Microsoft's $375 million acquisition of the studio in 2002, Rare was forced to finally part ways with the *DK* series, spelling the end of not only a lucrative and prolific relationship with Nintendo but also with the *Donkey Kong* franchise and its characters. Despite Rare still being allowed to continue its work on developing the *DKC* conversions for Nintendo's Game Boy handhelds (see 'Mini Lands Of The Kongs'), the two studios parting ways saw two *Donkey Kong* projects in development at Rare aborted: a planned GameCube follow-up to *Diddy Kong Racing* titled *Donkey Kong Racing*, which was unveiled at E3 in 2001 and showed DK and relatives racing on the back of the animal helpers from the *Donkey Kong Country* series; and *Donkey Kong Coconut Crackers*, an isometric puzzle game for the Game Boy Advance. The latter game eventually did see release in 2004 when it was redesigned as the puzzle game *It's Mr Pants* and, instead of DK, starred a crudely drawn bowler hat-wearing creation taken from Rare's website.

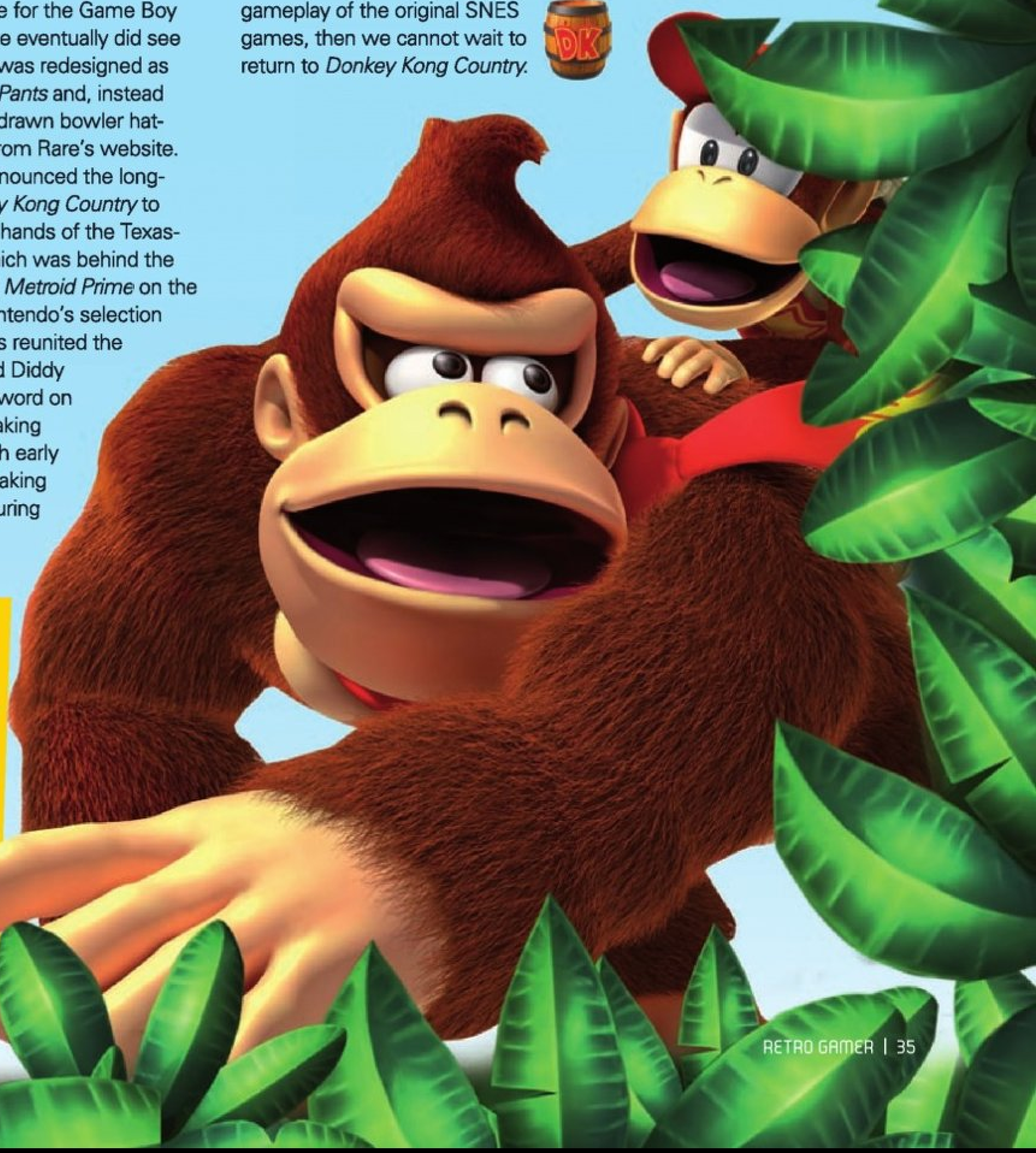
This year Nintendo announced the long-awaited return of *Donkey Kong Country* to our screens. Now in the hands of the Texas-based Retro Studios, which was behind the impressive series revival *Metroid Prime* on the GameCube, it seems Nintendo's selection is a sound one. Retro has reunited the original *DKC* duo, DK and Diddy – so far there's been no word on any of the other apes making an appearance – and with early footage showing levels taking place in jungles and featuring white-knuckle mine cart rides, the developer is clearly taking strong inspiration from the original *Donkey Kong Country* universe that Rare designed some 16 years ago. New features will include a simultaneous co-op mode in the style of *New Super Mario Bros Wii*, and the introduction of a new enemy to the series in the form of the tribal Tikis. Indeed, the game so far looks like it's shaping up very nicely indeed. Whether its arrival will have anything like the same impact as the series had when it first swung onto the scene in 1994 remains to be seen, but if there's one thing history has told us, it's that DK is a resilient beast, and in recent years has been good at helping develop strong relationships rather than break them up. If Retro Studios can succeed in capturing the spirit and gameplay of the original SNES games, then we cannot wait to return to *Donkey Kong Country*.



» [N64] Opinions were mixed about *DK64*, but we think it's a fitting swansong by Rare in the *DK* franchise.







CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…



» [Amiga] *Heimdall*'s focus is more on exploring than all-out hack-and-slashing, so fighting fans will be disappointed.



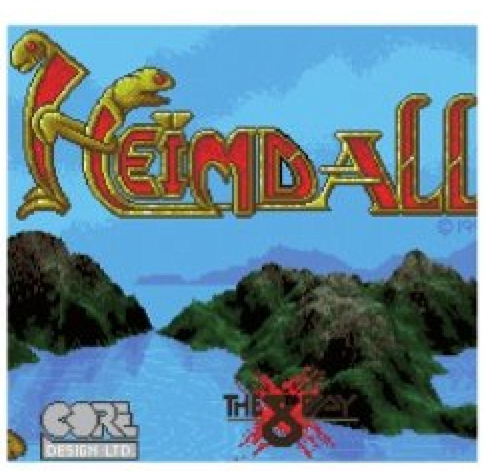
» [Amiga] The mini-game where a drunken Heimdall must fling axes at a barmaid is one of the game's most iconic moments.



» [Amiga] Combat is surprisingly strategic, but also rather fiddly to use. Real-time fighting was adopted for the sequel.



» [Amiga] *Heimdall*'s cut-scenes still look superb, and it's easy to see the influence of Don Bluth in them.



INFO

- **SYSTEM:** AMIGA
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** ATARI ST, CD32, DOS, MEGA-CD
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PUBLISHER:** CORE DESIGN
- **DEVELOPER:** THE 8TH DAY

HEIMDALL

Try as we might, we can find hardly any information on developer The 8th Day. A real shame, as it was behind one of our favourite Amiga games. Namely the rather wonderful *Heimdall*, an entertaining take on traditional Norse mythology that was filled with humour, clever puzzles and some truly gorgeous animation.

In fact, *Heimdall*'s cut-scenes still look fantastic to this day, instantly capturing the animation techniques of Don Bluth – graphic artist Jerr O'Carroll actually worked at Bluth's studio in Ireland before becoming involved with *Heimdall*. Filled with humour and endearing characters, they add greatly to the game's bubbly charm and give it a real epic feel.

The god Heimdall has been born to a virgin and must seek out a number of important artefacts that have been hidden away by the mischievous god Loki in order to give him the advantage when Ragnarok – the end of the world in Norse mythology – strikes. What follows is a sprawling isometric adventure that's filled with plenty of clever touches that helped separate it from the likes of *Cadaver* and *The Immortal*.

Take Heimdall's initial growth to puberty, for example. While it can be ignored, it's far more fun to take part in, as competing in mini-games determines your overall stats for the start of the game. Throwing axes at a wench's head as she's tied to a wooden table remains the best, but having to clear a ship full of enemies and wrestling a greased pig are also enjoyable. Once completed, you recruit five crew members to aid you on your epic quest. They range from wizards to berserkers and navigators, and each one supplements the party in a number of different ways.

Then it's simply a case of exploring the three gigantic worlds: Midgard, Asgard and Utgard. Well, we say simple, but these areas are massive, each comprising a large number of islands, which in turn consist of snaking labyrinths that must be negotiated. It's an arduous quest not helped by the huge number of traps and monsters that lie in wait for you. Fortunately, your team is more than capable of dealing with whatever crosses its path, and while the combat isn't as intuitive and as tight as needed, it's still quite inventive.

Combat takes place in a window, and you can select what weapons and spells you wish to attack with. What's interesting here, though, is that successful attacks are based on how an enemy is positioned when you prepare to strike it. It's a nice enough idea, but a little too fiddly for its own good, and it was eventually dropped for an easier – but admittedly less satisfying – alternative in the sequel.

And yet, while the combat is rather weak, for the vast majority of its time *Heimdall* does everything right. It's certainly not the greatest example of the genre ever made, but it remains a highly entertaining title that rightly deserved the many plaudits heaped on it for its release.



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The Making Of...



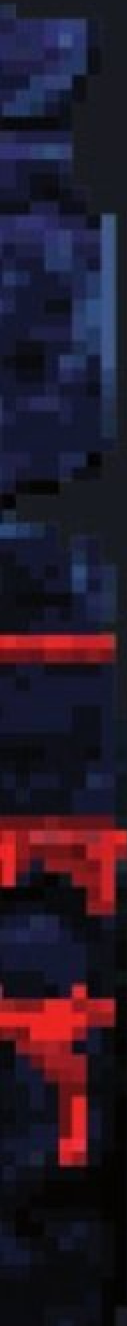
It's the far future and **Craig Grannell** surveys a bleak scene: civilisation is gone. All that remains: radiation-scarred landscapes populated by primitive tribes and duelling dinosaur-like deities. But in the distance, another human emerges from the mist: ex-Atari designer **Dennis Harper**. Perhaps he can shed some light on why the world has descended into a primal rage…













IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE (LATER CONVERTED TO VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS)
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **GENRE:** 2D FIGHTER
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+ FOR AN ORIGINAL CABINET



» [Arcade] Inspired by a TV show about an asteroid hitting Earth, Harper created an animated intro for *Primal Rage*'s attract mode.



In the early Nineties, fighting games were all the rage, and Dennis Harper, having finished *Moto Frenzy*, was keen to return to a "purist kind of videogame". As a fan of putting his own twist on something that already works, his desires neatly dovetailed with Atari's demands for a fighting game: "It was very strange. I got an idea out of the blue to do a *Street Fighter*-style game, but using dinosaurs, which I thought would differentiate it from all the *Street Fighter* clones coming out at the time."

When Harper revealed his plans, Atari art guy Jason Leong claimed that he'd already had the idea and presented sketches of dinosaurs ripping flesh off each other. Deciding to team up, the pair and other like-minded Atari employees set about transferring their vision to the arcades. Harper was keen to give his creatures a level of detail and texture previously unheard of in videogames, but this was an era of flat-shaded polygons. "It occurred to me that using stop-motion, taking pictures of real models, would be an interesting way to go," recalls Harper, a lifelong Ray Harryhausen fan. The idea was presented to the project team, which included Atari's president. "They didn't get it," he says. "I told them: 'Give me a month and I'll show you.'"

Harper's team set to work. A LaserDisc copy of *The Valley Of Gwangi*, a late-Sixties fantasy western where cowboys meet prehistoric creatures in the ominous-sounding Forbidden Valley, was used to capture video footage. "We found dinosaur poses we liked and cut the dinosaurs into pieces, so their parts could be separately animated," says Harper. "We ended up with this strange piece-together stop-motion animation that was derived from a movie, but we were able to get a demo together, showing a dinosaur running around and biting another dinosaur." The project team thought the demo was amazing, but Harper told them Atari's game would be a hundred times better, because while the demo used footage the team had no control over, in the game they'd control everything.



» Dennis Harper

One green light later, the team found itself immersed in character design. Jason Leong created numerous concepts for prehistoric beasts, each with different attributes and attacks. Harper hooked up with a local stop-motion house that introduced him to professional animator Pete Kleinow, famous for his work on *The Gumby Show*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Gremlins* and the *Terminator* films. He educated the *Primal Rage* team on the process of stop-motion before bringing on board an LA-based puppet-maker. "The model-making process was intense," remembers Harper. "We'd create sketches and 'architectural' ideas of how we wanted the beasts to look, in terms of scale and proportion. The puppet-maker would then make clay models, updating them as we asked for changes."

Each clay figure was cast in a mould, and the puppet-maker then built an intricate, detailed skeleton. The skeleton was then placed inside the mould, which was injected with foam latex that became the beast's 'skin'. A final process of painting and detailing resulted in a poseable *Primal Rage* beast, ready for filming. "Each model cost $50,000 – and that's back in the Nineties," laughs Harper. "My budget had certainly gone up a bit since the *Toobin'* days, and project management was like, 'This had better be good!'"

Forging ahead in breaking new ground, the team took the advice of Pete Kleinow and constructed a shooting stage, referred to as 'the cove'. During the shoot, the team devised a patented animation technique, based around taking three shots of a model. "We lit the stage very brightly and took a photo from the front of the beast, which we called the 'beauty shot'," begins Harper. "We then turned off all lights bar one behind the cove and created a matte, like a silhouette, for our second shot. The third photo was





» [Arcade] Battle all you want, Diablo. We're using a cheat mode, so you can't hurt us! Mwahaha!

lit from above, so the beast cast a shadow." Through image-editing trickery and other processing, the team created batch commands that took the matte, cut out the beauty shot and created a composite that added the shadow.

Thousands of photos later, it was time to make the beasts interactive. A massive matrix of move transitions was created, to avoid animation 'popping', and the team then figured out the game's controls. "The system we came up with is unique, but, honestly, if I had to do it over, I'd do things differently," admits Harper, adding that pressure from Atari to differentiate *Primal Rage* from *Street Fighter II* impacted the control system. "In *Street Fighter II*, you move the joystick and hit a button to make a move. We reversed that. In *Primal Rage*, you hold buttons and move the stick. In hindsight, it's more satisfying smacking a button to attack your foe than it is to move a joystick."

An exception to setting apart *Primal Rage* from *Street Fighter II* was made in the key area of timing. "We thought *Street Fighter II* was almost a perfect game, and I say that with great respect, because whoever designed and tuned it really got it," says Harper. "They figured out the high-speed interaction between two players and how it all comes together, and the entire game feels so good. We therefore thought, 'Why should we do anything different?'"

The team's cunning plan to replicate this aspect of Capcom's classic fighter involved videotaping two seasoned players and analysing the recordings on a frame-by-frame basis. By going through the footage in painstaking detail, and often replicating the timings, *Primal Rage* started to feel a lot like a *Street Fighter* game. "Obviously, our moves are a lot different, because *Primal Rage* features animals with claws, jaws, tails and spitting venom, and so it was tuned to be our own game," says Harper. "But we started from a perfect piece of art, which had a great tuning model. I think that's one reason why *Primal Rage* did well – the *Street Fighter II* crowd came over and it gave them a break, enabling them to play something familiar but a little different, a little funnier and more unique."



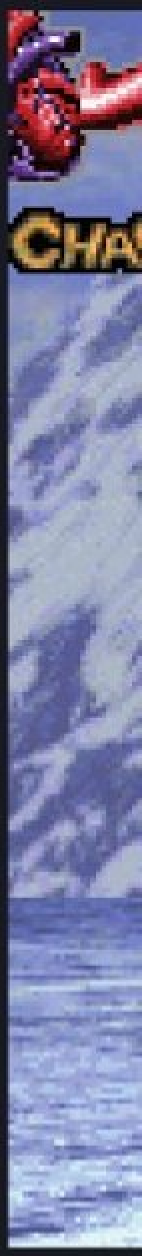
» [Arcade] *Primal Rage II* has human deities that morph into beasts. Unreleased and almost impossible to emulate, the chances you'll ever play it are slim.

This meticulous attention to detail came at a price: the one-player mode was poor. "The game was far along in the two-player mode, but when Atari's executive team played one-player games, it was just horrible," remembers Harper. "The AI didn't know what to do – it wouldn't attack properly and would cower in the corner, blocking." Told that nothing further was to be done on *Primal Rage* until this was fixed, the team set about writing a 'predictability tree', figuring out how the AI should react. Instead of doing this in mechanical fashion, the *Street Fighter* players used for the timing videos were quizzed, and reaction tables were based on their answers. "Talk about tedious work… Oh my gosh," says Harper, still seemingly a little haunted by this stage of the game's development. "The designers went through every combination of attack and defensive moves. The AI could decide to block, attack or do an interrupt, and for every possible scenario, the AI had to throw something intelligent back."

This was complicated by other factors. There were seven characters and various difficulty levels, and Harper jokes that they were still working on the AI when the game shipped. It's probably for the best,



» [Arcade] It was around this time that Diablo realised he should really cut back on the vindaloos.





CASH MACHINE

IT WASN'T LONG before *Primal Rage* escaped the confines of the screen, due to various marketing people going very slightly crazy. Board games, slide projectors and even *Primal Rage* shoes appeared, but Harper is in no doubt about the most successful tie-in line. "The coolest thing was the action figures," he asserts. "We had this marketing guy who was super into toys, and he thought *Primal Rage* was perfect for action figures." Playmate was contacted, received pictures of the original models, and created what Harper calls "perfect little toys" of the game's various beasts.

"I remember the day we got a shipment of *Primal Rage* toys into our lab, and I was like: 'I think I've made it!' All this work and I was suddenly looking at something I'd just thought of in my brain a few years before. And then, there it is, ready to go on the shelves of local toy stores," says Harper. "It was an amazing feeling, and I've never worked on a game since that's done anything close. And I say that having worked on bigger games like *The Godfather*, which sold something like 6 million copies – but it didn't have action figures!"



Photos courtesy of Dennis Harper

» *Primal Rage* action figures were successful, and were the only 'official' element of the sequel to be released.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TOOBIN' (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1988

HYDRA
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1990

MOTO FRENZY
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1992

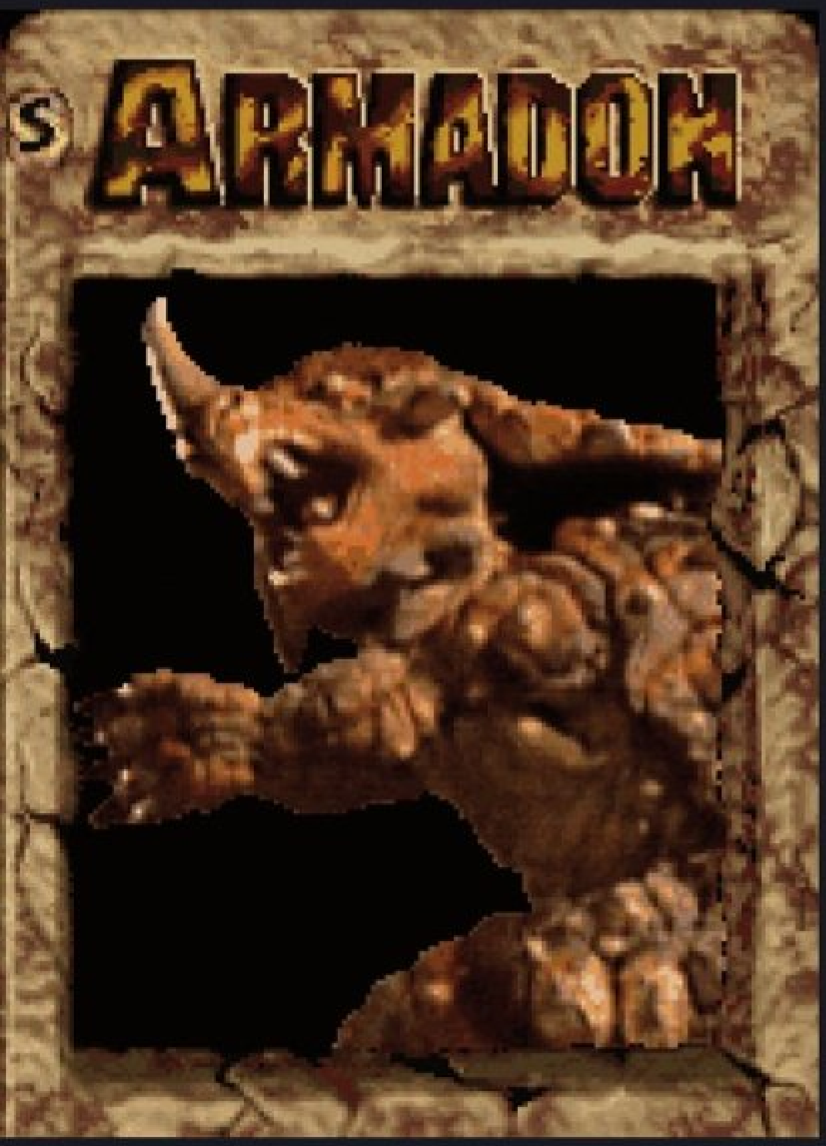


» [Arcade] Chaos gets angry with Blizzard, breaking *Primal Rage* Rule #541: No flying unless you have wings.

EMULATION FRUSTRATION

PRIMAL RAGE IS one of few games of its era that has never been successfully emulated – and that includes the version on *Midway Arcade Treasures 2*. The security methods in the original ROMs make the game randomly censor blood, prevent fatalities from being performed, and cause other issues relating to attacks. "I gotta admit, I was Atari's security expert at the time, and so that was down to me," says Harper. "Copying was rampant in that era – our games would get copied and reproduced wholesale in the Asian markets."

Harper explains that the security was even more severe in the sequel. "As far as I know, *Primal Rage II* has never been fully emulated, and that's because it has a system that streams animation from a hard disk. Unless you have the disk image and can emulate the machine's streaming capabilities, you won't get anywhere. There was also a security chip called the Slapstick, and if you don't talk to it on a regular basis and know what it does, it fires off a time bomb of sorts that scrambles everything."



"Joe Lieberman attacked Primal Rage in a speech, and sales of the game peaked"

then, that a choice had been made to avoid confusing matters further by implementing dynamic difficulty. "I always hated games that figured out how good I was and then tried to beat me better – I think if a player gets good at your game, they should beat it," reasons Harper. "Remember that they pay for getting good at your game, so you shouldn't dynamically adjust to their skills, making them get all mad and leave. And anyway, the arcade owner could ramp up the difficulty to get more money out of players if they wanted to."

On release, *Primal Rage* was a hit. Harper describes it as a "solid performer" in the arcades, where it sold about 15,000 units, but when it was ported to home systems, it sold millions, propelled by its novelty value and also in capturing the zeitgeist of the time, where people were mesmerised by *Jurassic Park*. The game, being a violent 2D fighter, also rode the inevitable wave of controversy on its way to success, although people getting angry about *Primal Rage* baffled Harper: "We were way less gory than, for instance, *Mortal Kombat*. We had these fantasy characters – dinosaurs and beasts – and they were almost like cartoons. It's not like we were ripping a guy's head off and pulling his spine out!"

Primal Rage was one of the games that caught the eye of Senator Joe Lieberman, a catalyst in the creation of the Electronic Software Ratings Board. "He got on his soapbox about violence in games and mentioned *Primal Rage* in a speech, and when he did sales of the game peaked," laughs Harper. "We also got complaints regarding gore and fatalities, but to tell you the truth we were largely sheltered from that stuff and it was after the fact. The game was done and for sale – and it sold millions, so all the people complaining couldn't have hurt it too badly. Also, for squeamish arcade owners there was a 'blood' switch on the original game, which is a fact critics seemed to ignore."

With *Primal Rage* a confirmed success, a sequel was ordered, but it ran into trouble. "For me, it was the beasts that made *Primal Rage* cool and gave the game its uniqueness – it was all about the monsters. But marketing were complaining that the game wasn't a mega-hit because it didn't have humans," recalls Harper. "My argument was *Primal Rage* with human characters would basically be *Street Fighter*, and we didn't want to go toe-to-toe with Capcom's series. Marketing forced the issue."

The team decided that each *Primal Rage* deity would have a beast-sized human avatar, and provided players with the option of morphing between them. Stop-motion animator and *Star Wars* alumnus Jon Berg was hired, and two stages were created on which to animate beasts and human figures. "We created really cool gameplay for morphing between states, and it was almost like you were playing two characters at once, switching back and forth at any time," enthuses Harper. "We also came up with a huge skeleton dinosaur boss, Necrosan, and Playmates created a whole new line of toys."

Unfortunately, the toys were all the world would see of *Primal Rage II*, which was canned after field-testing poorly. "It certainly wasn't a failure, because everyone who played it thought it was great," asserts Harper. Instead, he reckons that the game was a casualty of a dying industry: "The arcade industry was tanking big time – mom and pop arcades were disappearing and large venues were concentrating on multiplayer driving simulators, with which they could take over $1,000 per week. *Primal Rage II* would do maybe $600, which wasn't enough, and this pretty much signalled the end of the quarter videogame. It's sad, because had the game arrived a few years earlier, there's no question it would have been a huge hit."



» [Arcade] *Primal Rage* was criticised for its gory content, but the team responded that the game was based around fantasy characters.

» YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO FORGOTTEN GAME SYSTEMS

OBSCURA MACHINA

#1 C64GS – The Games System





» [C64GS] *Wrath Of The Demon* takes its inspiration from *Shadow Of The Beast*. This level features 12 levels of parallax scrolling.







JUST THE FACTS

Sales estimates suggest Commodore sold around 20,000 out of a production run of 80,000 systems. Leftover components went into making C64Cs.

The Secret Weapons of Commodore website maintained by Cameron Kaiser has unconfirmed reports of the C64CGS – a GS system with a proper keyboard – being sold in Ireland.

Switching on the GS without a cartridge present gave a small animation telling the player to switch off and insert a cartridge.

The GS had additional software in ROM for creating drop-down windows, but software using it would have been incompatible with the standard computer.

The C64GS could boot software from the TIB Ultimate 3.5" disk drive, which plugged into the cartridge port.

There were just 27 official releases for the C64GS, including three titles from Norwegian studio Silverrock.

The launch price of the console was £99, but within 18 months shops were selling off stock for as little as £19.99. Boxed examples on eBay now sell for more than £100.

Commodore's international divisions often came up with their own projects. Commodore Japan had created the Max (or Ultimax) based on the same chips as the C64 and loading games from cartridge, but its limited memory and membrane keyboard made it a flop. In 1989, Commodore Germany released a C64 bundle containing the computer, a joystick and three games on a single cartridge. Commodore UK took the concept further with the C64GS, putting the standard motherboard into a new case without a keyboard and some of the external ports. Games were cartridge-only, with a top-mounted slot. The graphic (VIC) and sound (SID) chips remained the same, unlike Amstrad's enhanced Plus range and GX4000 console. Existing cartridges generally had a limit of 16K, so Commodore called in an expert.

Programmer John Twiddy was famous for *The Last Ninja*, as well as devising the Cyberload loading system and the Trilogic Expert cartridge. In January of 1990, Commodore approached his new company, Vivid Image. Twiddy's prototype cartridge had 512K of ROM and a battery backup, with potential for up to 2MB. It used bank-switching techniques, similar to those used by the NES, to give the greater capacity. The new system allowed a disk drive to simulate loading from cartridge.

For software houses, Commodore's plans to take on Nintendo had some key advantages. Commodore was not charging a licence fee or restricting the number of games a company could make in a year – Ocean's relationship with Nintendo meant that certain games, like *Bart Simpson vs The Space Mutants* and *WWF WrestleMania*, could not be put onto cartridge. Companies already knew how to program for the C64, and Commodore would handle the cartridge production. Cartridges were harder to pirate than tapes and disks, and would retail at a higher price, ranging from £14.99 up to £29.99, compared with £9.99 for a standard tape game. The promise at the ECTS trade show that summer was of 100 cartridge games in time for Christmas 1990.

In 1990, Commodore gave the C64 a makeover, turning it into the C64GS. Andrew Fisher looks back at the failure of the cartridge format



» The logo appeared on the top of the machine.

Bundled with the machine was a four-game cartridge and an Annihilator joystick in matching cream and red colours. The classic *International Soccer* was reprogrammed for joystick controls in the menu, while System 3's *Flimbo's Quest* was a cute platform game and Domark provided arcade puzzle game *Klax* with its falling tiles. Three quarters of the cartridge was *Fiendish Freddie's Big Top O' Fun*, mixing black humour with circus skills. With instant loading, this was much more fun to play on cartridge than from tape or disk.

The magazine market took notice too. *Zzap!* added the console to its coverage and would go back to being C64-only the following year, and the first issue of *Commodore Format* had a big spread on the new machine. The hype surrounded big-name titles – the Amiga showcase *Shadow Of The Beast* was a shining example of something that would have proved difficult to convert without the instant loading. A subsequent pirated disk version had long loading times.

Ocean was the main supporter of the GS – and Amstrad's GX4000 – creating its own development system. A modified version of Paul Hughes' Freeload system pulled in new data as it was needed. The distinctive black cardboard boxes reminded users that the cartridges were also compatible with the standard C64, although the advertisements sought to confuse with their talk of '8 meg' cartridges, meaning 8 megabits, or 256K. *Navy SEALs* used the space to great effect with extra bitmap presentation, while *Chase HQ II* used the Annihilator's extra fire button for its nitro boost. Strangest of all was *Double Dragon*, a new version of the coin-op first converted by Melbourne House. This 'loaded' extra types of enemy as a level was played, and is now one of the rarest C64 titles.

Domark put three of its arcade conversions on cartridge, with only *Cyberball* making use of the format to give a larger playbook. System 3 promised enhanced versions of old games and new titles. *Last Ninja Remix* was essentially *Last Ninja 2* with a new status panel, remixed music and an extra introductory sequence. *Myth: History In The Making* appeared on cartridge, but sequel *Dawn Of Steel* was never finished. The much-anticipated *Last Ninja 3* never saw a cartridge release, appearing on tape and disk only. Spanish company Dinamic released *Narco Police* and four other titles in limited quantities, making them rare for collectors. Less well-known were the Australian company Home Entertainment Suppliers' range of licensed cartridges including *Leaderboard*, and the four-game compilations published in 1995/96 by Polish company Atrax using games licensed from budget specialist Alternative.

» Simon Quernhorst's limited edition *R8ro* has eight small games on a single cartridge.



The NES, with its *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* pack, and the 16-bit Sega Mega Drive proved strong competition for both the GS and the Amstrad GX4000. Shops were soon selling the GS cheap, and development was halted. Gamers missed out on double-pack compilations of classic Thalamus titles, the stunning *Wrath Of The Demon* – only available on disk in the end – and the planned conversion of *Starglider II*. The cartridge releases and the machine itself eventually became very collectable and hackers added a keyboard and disk drives to make the GS more useful, while Atari homebrew enthusiast Simon Quernhorst created limited edition cartridges designed to be compatible with the GS. It was only a footnote in the history of the C64, but the GS had an important legacy.



» *Pang* was one of several cartridge games borne of Ocean's enthusiastic support for the system.

PERFECT THREE



BATTLE COMMAND

■ Realtime Software used the cartridge to store 3D data tables, making this filled-vector conversion of the Amiga tank sim an impressive-looking game, right down to the missile-eye view.



POWERPLAY

■ The Disk Company's cartridge compilation had three brilliant games: Core Design's tricky platformer *Rick Dangerous*, Geoff Crammond's *Stunt Car Racer*, and Sensible Software's *MicroProse Soccer* in its 11-a-side iteration.



TOKI

■ *Pang* and *Space Gun* were excellent arcade conversions put on cartridge by Ocean as it worked to bolster the system's line-up, but the spitting ape, huge end-of-level bosses and tough gameplay give *Toki* the edge.

With thanks to Mat Allen for photographs of the GS.

Don't Copy That Floppy

Back in simpler times, games were easy to copy. And so copy them we did. The early games industry was hampered by piracy so rampant it would have made Captain Jack Sparrow's eyeliner run. Profit margins were slashed, developers went under – traditional lawmakers seemed helpless in the face of this marauding horde of buccaneers. But a few brave souls fought back. Tim Clare tells their story…

At the start of the century, many commentators warned that MP3s and illegal downloads spelt the end for the music industry – and, for a while, it looked like they might be right. Why, after all, would punters fork out for something they could so easily get for nothing? Most people, after all, see piracy as a victimless crime. The advert says, 'You wouldn't steal a car,' which is true, but it's not a very accurate analogy. Pirating a DVD or album is more like having the ability to almost instantly make a free duplicate of your mate's car, while keeping the original intact – and if we could do that, then, actually, we probably would. We all would, right?

In the Eighties and early Nineties, games developers faced a similar problem. Copying games onto cassette, floppy disk and, later, CD, was quick, cheap, easy and, for most people, guilt-free. Friends copied games from friends. Dirt cheap compilations appeared on stalls at car boot sales. Many people owned more pirated games than genuine titles. Companies warned that, unless something was done to halt the rising tide of illegal duplication of software, the future of the games industry was in dire jeopardy.

Something had to be done. Basic protection measures prevented casual users from easily making usable duplicates, but as pirates found ways to get round technical impediments to copying tapes and







» Lenslok looked futuristic but proved to be a fiddly pig in a poke.



floppies, developers needed to become ever more devious with their countermeasures.

Before the days of aggressive DRM and online verification, copy protection was a low-tech, ramshackle thing. Most gamers can remember one of the earliest, most basic, and most popular forms of copy protection, where a game would instruct the player to go to a certain page, paragraph and line in the manual, and to type in the relevant word. After a number of unsuccessful tries – usually three – the game would either reset or lock the player out, thus foiling any scurrilous pirates who had copied the game but did not own a copy of the manual.

Usually, gamers would be asked this question right at the beginning, but sometimes – particularly in text adventures – it would happen after the player had progressed a certain distance into the game. In Magnetic Scrolls' tongue-in-cheek kleptomaniac adventure *Guild Of Thieves*, for example, the game would wait until you had made 100 entries into the text interface before prompting you to refer to a specific word in the manual, "to make sure you're not a thief". Fail to correctly input the word three times, and the game would lock up.

Finicky East vs West DOS-based space simulation *Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space* only presented the player with a copy protection prompt when launching specific space missions. Players would be required to input the total time spent in space by veteran astronauts, information which was included in the manual. If you got it wrong, your poor would-be spacemen would be blown up in a horrible shuttle launch accident.

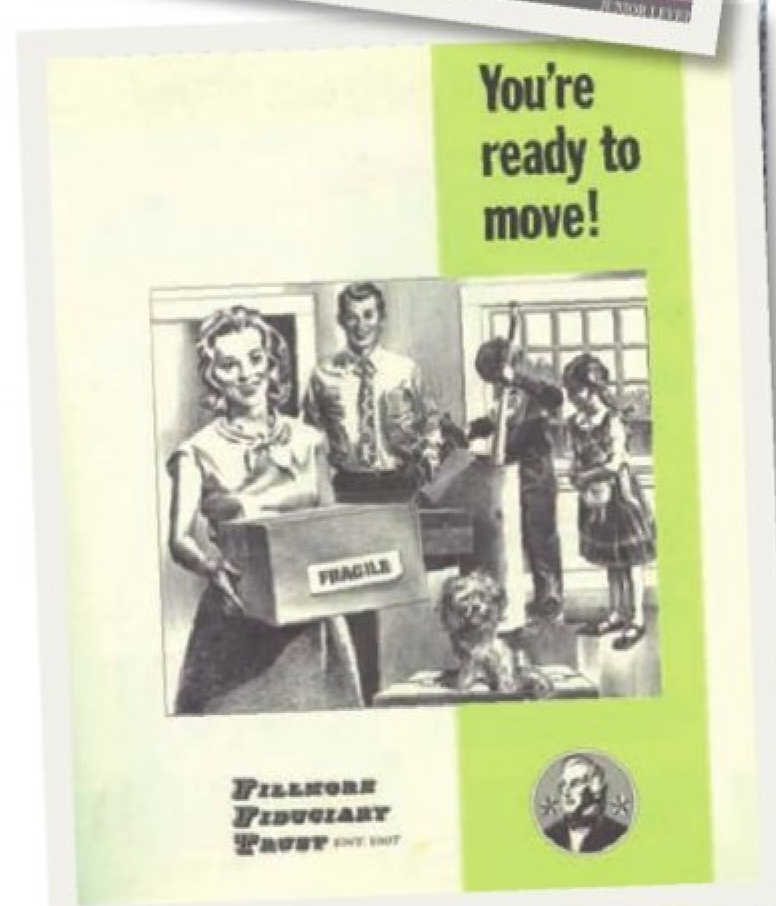
By hiding copy protection a little way into games rather than having it confront the player on loading, some companies hoped to have their cake and eat it. Pirates would unwittingly copy and distribute what, in effect, ended up being demo versions of the game, allowing naughty thieving punters to sample a small snippet of the full release before it locked them out. The thinking went that if players had enjoyed it up until then, chances are they would stump up for a bona fide copy.



But the problem was that text-based manuals, even relatively sizeable ones, could be easily and cheaply photocopied, several pages to a sheet of A4. In response, many games introduced colour-based code systems that could not be reproduced as black-and-white photocopies. These, too, however, were not without problems. *Manic Miner* sequel *Jet Set Willy* came packaged with a notoriously complex and fiddly chart consisting of 180 tiny coloured blocks arranged in a grid. On loading, the game would present you with a grid reference and ask you what colour the relevant block was. Given that each was less than a millimetre in width, this system saw much gnashing of teeth and flinging of cassette cases as four minutes of precious loading time went down the swanny.

UNDER LOK AND KEY

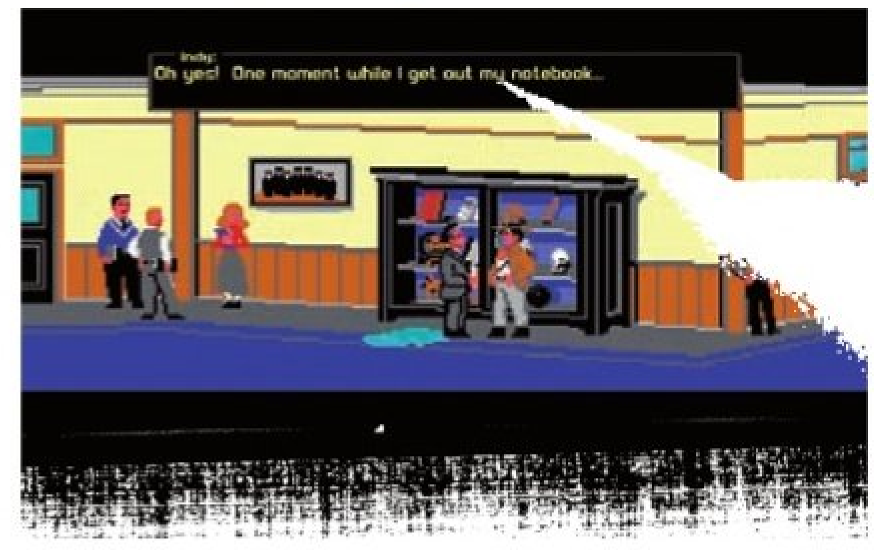
One of the most inventive – and loathed – early copy protection systems was Lenslok. Created by inventor John Frost, it was a small device made of plastic, with a transparent lens. Shipped flat with games, it had a hinged flap either side that needed to be folded back to create a frame. The lens had a series of ridges that bent light to decode images on the screen, turning them into letters. The lens then needed to be pressed up against the TV when prompted, in order to read a code. It was bundled with games like *Elite*, *Moon Cresta* and software like OCP Art Studio, appearing on systems such as the ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC and the 8-bit Atari, among others. "Lenslok is extremely easy to use," claimed the accompanying literature cheerfully, words that rang with bitter irony in the ears of furious gamers.



» Appropriately, Douglas Adams' *Bureaucracy* came with a lot of paperwork.

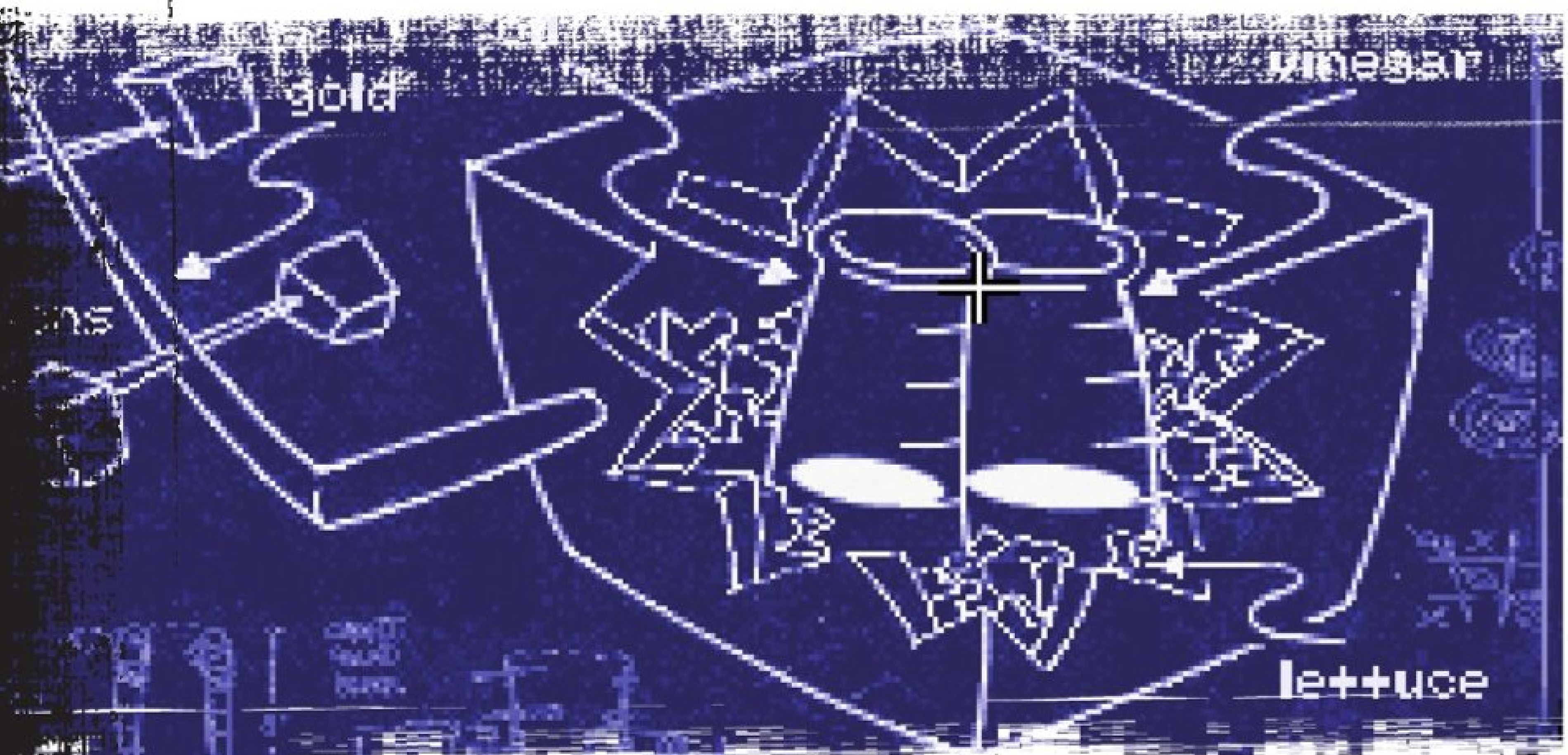
In theory, using Lenslok was straightforward, if a little arduous. When the copy protection screen appeared – sometimes on loading, sometimes, as in games like *Jewels Of Darkness* on the C64, after a set number of turns – first up, a large capital 'H' would appear. Using the keys specified, the player had to adjust the letter until it was the same width as the unfolded lens holder. Next, you had to fold the two wings of the lens holder to form a U shape, making sure that the bit that said 'This Side Out' was on the outside. Next, you had to hold the lens at arm's length, with the feet of the lens holder braced firmly against the television screen, and, with one eye closed, line up the central line marked on it with the line displayed on screen. Are you getting all this? Good.

> "Before DRM, copy protection was a low-tech, ramshackle thing"

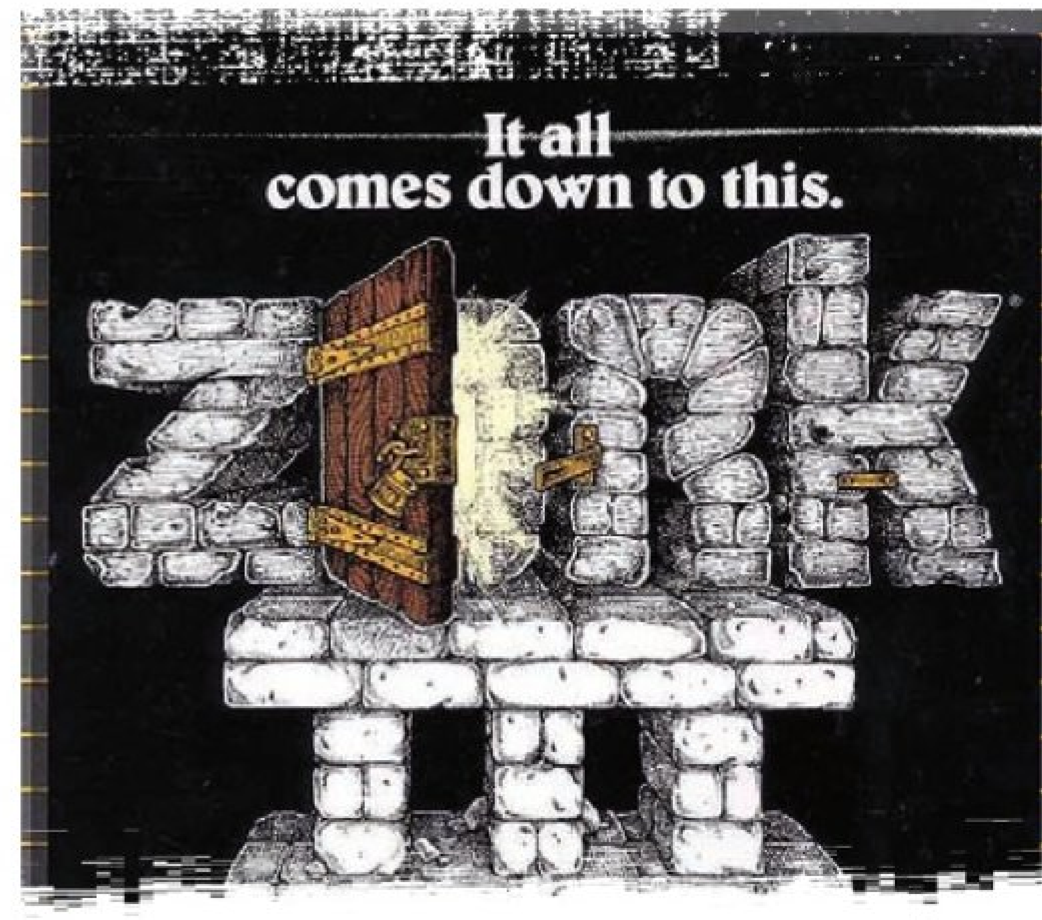


Next, you had to lower your head slightly, making sure it was at least a foot away from the lens, until

Don't Copy That Floppy



» [DOS] Dr Fred's super battery needs a few tweaks…



» The Zorkmid remains strong against the yen.

the letters 'OK' became visible. Finally, making sure you kept the lens holder braced in exactly the same place, you had to reach down and press the space bar. If all was well, a two-letter code would appear where the message had been. Input these two letters, and phew, at last, you were done.



Never mind that it required legitimate owners to do a ridiculous amount of monkeying around just to use a game that they'd paid for. Never mind that games wouldn't only reset your computer for failing to put the right code in, but often also for taking too long to input the code. Never mind that many users found Lenslok so complicated and fiddly that they struggled to play their own games. Worse than all those problems, was that, in many cases, Lenslok simply didn't work.

Particularly large or small televisions rendered the lens holder useless, as the 'H' displayed on screen during calibration could not be shrunk down small enough or expanded wide enough to allow the code letters to be displayed properly. Most egregiously, when the Spectrum version of *Elite* was released, the wrong version of the Lenslok device was shipped with approximately 500 copies of the game, meaning that it was completely incapable of decoding the letters on screen.

Although it was initially received eagerly by companies desperate for a way to stem the rising tide of game piracy, Lenslok ultimately proved to be unwieldy and unreliable. What had appeared to be an elegant, high-tech solution ended up doing more harm than good – you know, like ED-209 in *RoboCop*.

KEEPING IT REAL

Another problem with security measures like Lenslok or demanding the player rifle through a boring manual to find a specific word is that they didn't do much to create an atmosphere. If you're a game designer, you want to build an immersive fictional universe that gamers can lose themselves in. Stopping the action to say, 'Hello, please take time out of your fun experience to provide a code from the manual so we know you didn't buy this off that dodgy guy down the market,' rather spoils the ambience. As a result, many games made at least a token effort to make their security measures vaguely in keeping with their imagined world.

Inherit The Earth: The Quest For The Orb was a 1994 point-and-click adventure game from The Dreamers Guild. In it, you control Rif, an anthropomorphic fox who lives on a version of Earth with medieval-level technology, from which it seems that all the humans have mysteriously vanished. His journey takes him to the book-filled catacombs of the rats, keepers of ancient knowledge. They remember the humans, since they were the first to be experimented on and granted the power of speech.

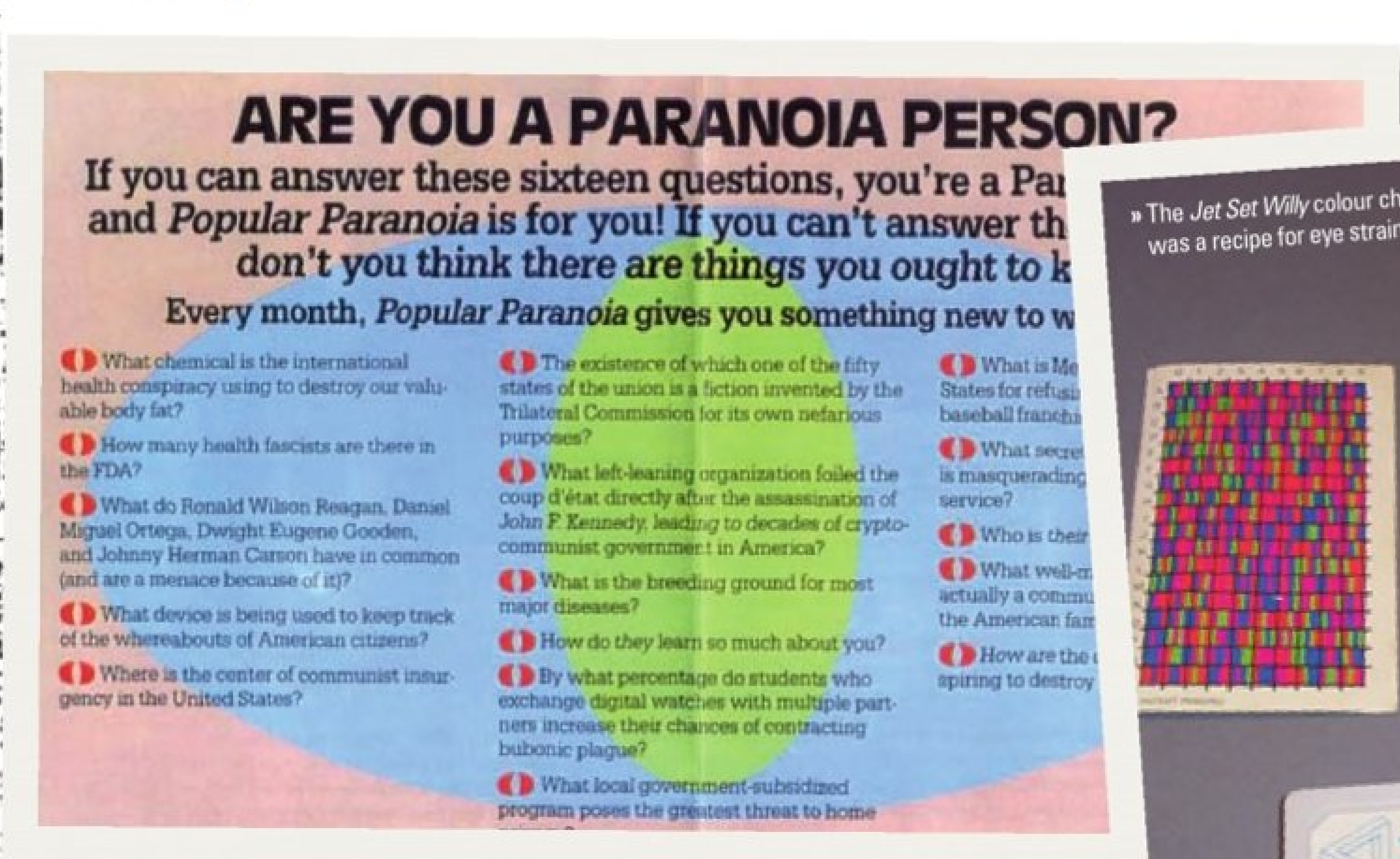
After conning his way into the catacombs by distracting the gatekeeper and donning a rat's cowl, Rif gets stopped at various points through the maze. There, a rat will mistake him for a fellow archivist and ask him a quick

Feelie Good

SOME OF THE best 'feelies' came with the Infocom games by Douglas Adams. *Bureaucracy* is an adventure that sees what should be a simple change of address spiral out into a Kafka-esque nightmare of form-filling and rising blood pressure. It came packaged with things like a flier promoting the magazine *Popular Paranoia*, entitled: 'Are You A Paranoia Person?'

Teasers on the form include: 'What left-leaning organisation foiled the coup d'etat directly after the assassination of John F Kennedy, leading to decades of crypto-communist government in America?', 'How are the dentists of America conspiring to destroy the minds of our children?' and 'How do *they* learn so much about you?'

Bureaucracy also came with several application forms, and a copy of a 'You're Ready To Move!' pamphlet. As well as containing scads of vintage Adams humour, these extras also had vital snippets of information that you would need if you were to progress through the game and not die of a stress-induced aneurysm. Infocom also reasoned that owning such cool accessories would encourage gamers to fork out for the real thing.


ARE YOU A PARANOIA PERSON?

If you can answer these sixteen questions, you're a Par
and *Popular Paranoia* is for you! If you can't answer th
don't you think there are things you ought to k

Every month, *Popular Paranoia* gives you something new to w

- What chemical is the international health conspiracy using to destroy our valuable body fat?
- How many health fascists are there in the FDA?
- What do Ronald Wilson Reagan, Daniel Miguel Ortega, Dwight Eugene Gooden, and Johnny Herman Carson have in common (and are a menace because of it)?
- What device is being used to keep track of the whereabouts of American citizens?
- Where is the center of communist insurgency in the United States?
- The existence of which one of the fifty states of the union is a fiction invented by the Trilateral Commission for its own nefarious purposes?
- What left-leaning organization foiled the coup d'état directly after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, leading to decades of crypto-communist government in America?
- What is the breeding ground for most major diseases?
- How do *they* learn so much about you?
- By what percentage do students who exchange digital watches with multiple partners increase their chances of contracting bubonic plague?
- What local government-subsidized program poses the greatest threat to home
- What is Me… States for refusi… baseball franchi…
- What secre… is masquerading… service?
- Who is their…
- What well-m… actually a commu… the American fam…
- How are the … spiring to destroy…



» The *Jet Set Willy* colour chart was a recipe for eye strain.

trivia question on the history of their world's tribes. The player must look up the relevant passage in the manual and type in the correct response. Three wrong answers, and the game resets itself, returning to DOS with the stark message: 'YOU ARE DEVOURED BY HUNDREDS OF SCREAMING RATS!' Charming.

LucasArts was particularly adept at this sort of game-related copy protection. The VGA version of *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* came bundled with a replica Grail diary, complete with back story, newspaper clippings, telegrams, coffee-stained pages and jottings from archaeological research. At the start of the game, Indy is asked by colleague Walter Donovan to help him translate a stone tablet. The player has three chances to enter the correct code based on the 'translation table' included with the game, which can only be viewed through a transparent red layer. If you fail to input the right code, Dr Jones presents Walter with a cack-handed mistranslation, and finds himself swiftly ejected from the building.

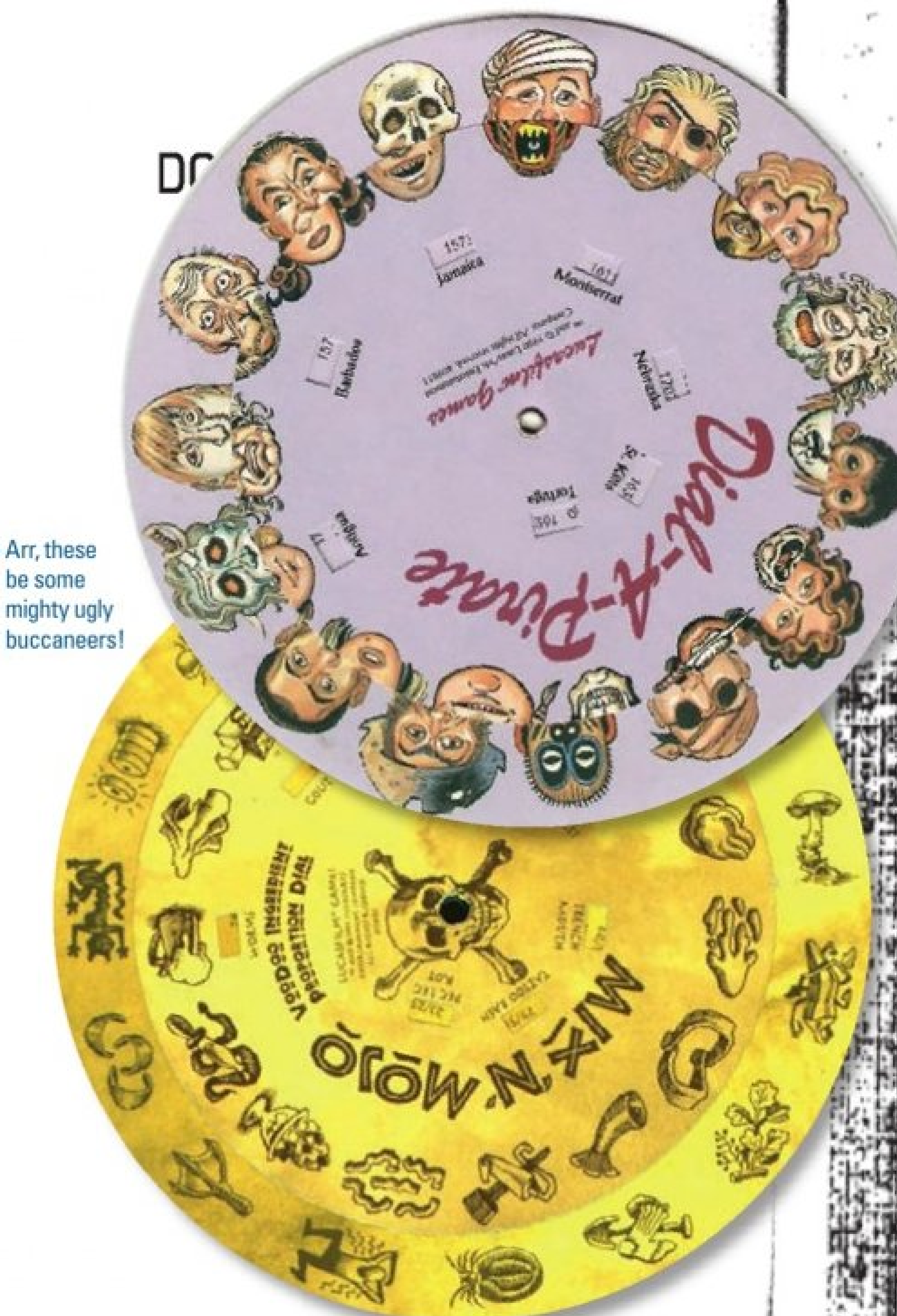
Music-themed point-and-click *Loom* was packaged with a 30-minute audio book detailing the game's back story, and an illustrated notebook, the 'Book Of Patterns'. The book was supposedly an artefact from the in-game world, a tome given to all apprentice members of the weavers' guild. As well as fleshing out the spells – or 'drafts', as they are referred to in the game – that the hero Bobbin Threadbare can use, the book also contained a series of musical notes. When the game starts, the player is presented with a guild's crest and the name of a 'secret weave', which must be looked up and the correct note matched to the symbol to begin the game proper.

Some versions of *Maniac Mansion* needed codes and telephone numbers to be read from the manual, and the copy protection to its sequel, *Day Of The Tentacle*, is also hidden further into the game. After mistakenly releasing the megalomaniacal Purple Tentacle then accidentally sending his friends Hoagie and Laverne into the past and future respectively, the hero Bernard must help Dr Fred rebuild the time-travelling toilets that sent them there. But when you bring Dr Fred the blueprint for his Super Salad Battery, he realises that he has made some errors in calculation. As a card-carrying super-nerd, Bernard offers to help him complete the design. At this point you must cross-reference the patent number in the top-right corner of the plans with the various versions of the Super Battery printed inside the game's manual. By adding or removing croutons from the gold-plated fork and adding extra olive oil to the two jars at its centre, you must make the battery in the blueprint look like the corresponding one in the manual. Get it right, and the game continues. Get it wrong, and Dr Fred shakes his head and tells you to try again… in an endless loop, until you get it right.

In that scenario, it might sound like you could just keep guessing until you stumble on the correct design, but with four croutons that can either be left on or removed, and five possible oil positions for two different jars, there are a possible total of 400 different Super Battery designs. Frankly, anyone bloody-minded enough to spend an entire day systematically going through every possible version deserves to get the game for nothing.

> "Many games tried to make their security in keeping with their imagined world"

Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders came complete with a 'passport' full of 'exit codes' for various countries. The player does not need to use them for most of the first part of the game, which sees Zak chasing down a two-headed squirrel for a tabloid story and waking a bus driver with a kazoo. However, as soon as you want to leave the USA for more far-flung destinations, you need to match four rather abstruse symbols to the appropriate grid reference on the chart. Fail to input the correct code five times, and instead of a trip to exotic Lima, Zak winds up in 'Pirate Jail'. Unlike the other jails in the



» Arr, these be some mighty ugly buccaneers!

Pirated Pirates

PROBABLY THE MOST famous piece of copy protection paraphernalia is *Monkey Island*'s much-loved 'Dial-A-Pirate' code wheel. The wheel was decorated with a motley succession of buccaneers, their faces all split laterally by the inner wheel. Twisting the wheel left or right created a mix-and-match effect, constructing bizarre new faces by recombining the old ones.

After loading, the game would confront you with a message that read: 'WAIT! Before we begin… let's have a quick history quiz.' You would then be shown a picture constructed from two halves of different pirates' faces, and asked a question like 'When was this pirate hung in Antigua?' or 'When was this pirate hung in Jamaica?' By rotating the wheel to create the relevant pirate, then looking through the appropriate slot in the inner wheel, you would get the answer.

Monkey Island 2 continued the theme with what it called 'Lame-O Copy Protection'. The opening screen presented you with a random voodoo recipe – for example: 'Recipe for Peg-Leg Rot: Mix _ duck feet with _ squirts of peg leg polish. Mix well.' By turning the code wheel to the recipe as specified, small slots would reveal the correct quantities of ingredients to input.



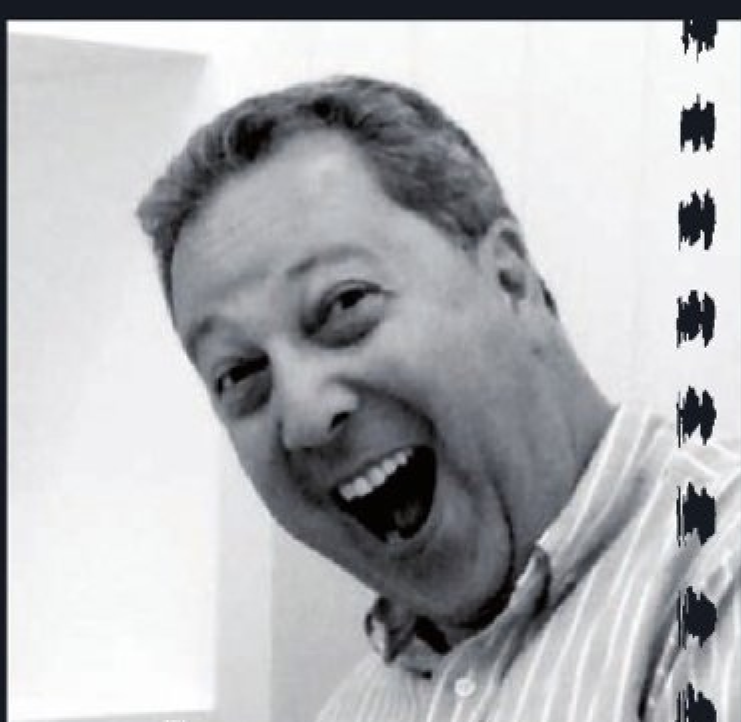
» [DOS] Some of the answers may be worth a wild guess.



Don't Copy That Floppy

Q&A With Gary Bracey

The former development manager at Ocean Software was at the helm at the height of the pirate invasion. We got in touch to find out what life was like on the swashbuckling front lines

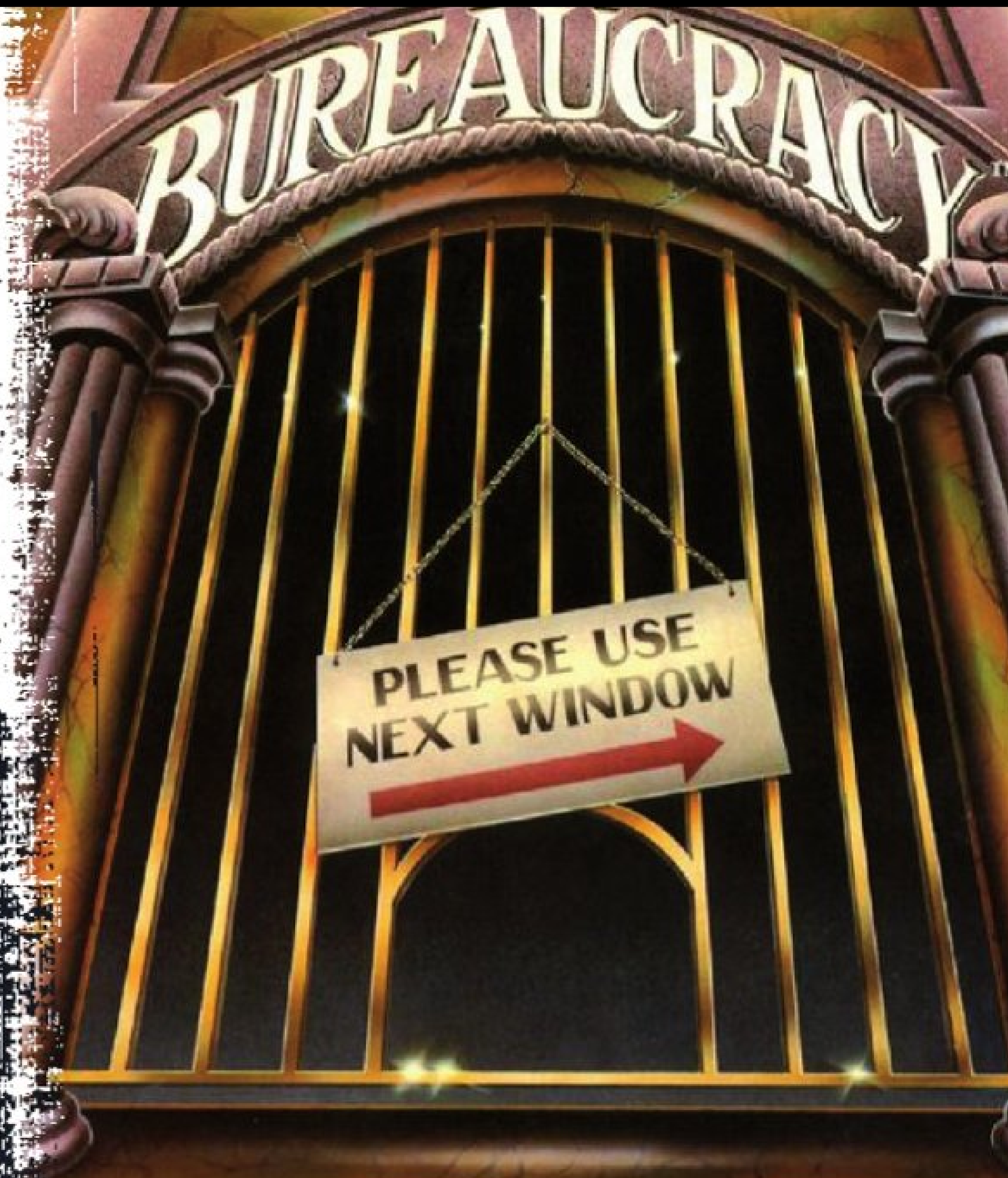


■ Just how badly did piracy affect the industry during your time at Ocean?
In hindsight I think the issue was made out to be a lot more damaging than it actually was. Don't get me wrong – piracy was a huge beastie back then, when cassettes and 3.5" floppy disks were easily copied and distributed. However, the key question is how much the industry was actually harmed by this. The answer can only be quantified if you believe that each pirated copy equals a lost sale, and I think that's a ridiculous assumption. I have little doubt that piracy did affect some direct sales, but to counter that, the potential 'marketing' exposure of having so many users playing and talking about the game in question may have actually influenced an upturn in real sales. The problem is that any such theory is speculative. The real issue, I think, is that people in the industry – myself included – got pretty emotional at the thought of folks 'stealing' what a group of people had worked hard on. In reality it's difficult to argue that it actually was 'stealing' per se, although there is a case for copyright theft. In commercial terms, though – and with the benefit of hindsight – I don't believe any real damage was done. At the time it was said by a few people that if piracy continued then there wouldn't be any money coming back into the industry to pay for the development of new product; if that prophecy had been accurate then there wouldn't be a videogames industry now!

■ How effective were the various copy protection methods at fighting back against piracy?
It was a fruitless aim, really. Whenever a new protection was announced then it was just seen by the hackers as throwing down the gauntlet, thus making a huge challenge to be the first one to crack it, which inevitably happened very quickly. It might have helped with protecting some of the casual 'playground' copying, but overall the protection had little effect, I think.

■ Did some of the negative aspects of copy protection ever outweigh the benefits?
Again, with the benefit of hindsight it might have done. Certain protection techniques made loading of the game a little more sensitive and therefore if your machine was a little below-par then you might have struggled to achieve a successful load. This may have resulted in returns… which is a bigger problem than piracy!

■ Did anything good come out of all that piracy?
Yeah, there was a good trilogy of movies starring Johnny Depp! Actually, I know a few ex-hackers who found very gainful employment in the gaming business. Anyone who put their talents to more legitimate endeavours in the industry probably made fairly significant contributions to coding, etc. I think also that we eventually learned that education and awareness is far more effective than physical anti-piracy measures such as copy protection. The bottom line is that most regular punters didn't even know that piracy was wrong, and so an effective campaign to enlighten would have been a much more beneficial solution.



> "Some aimed to actively frustrate pirates and waste their time"

game, there is no means of escape, and a large Jolly Roger flag adorns the wall. By way of punishment, Zak and the player are treated to a lecture on the evils of piracy by the jail's warden.

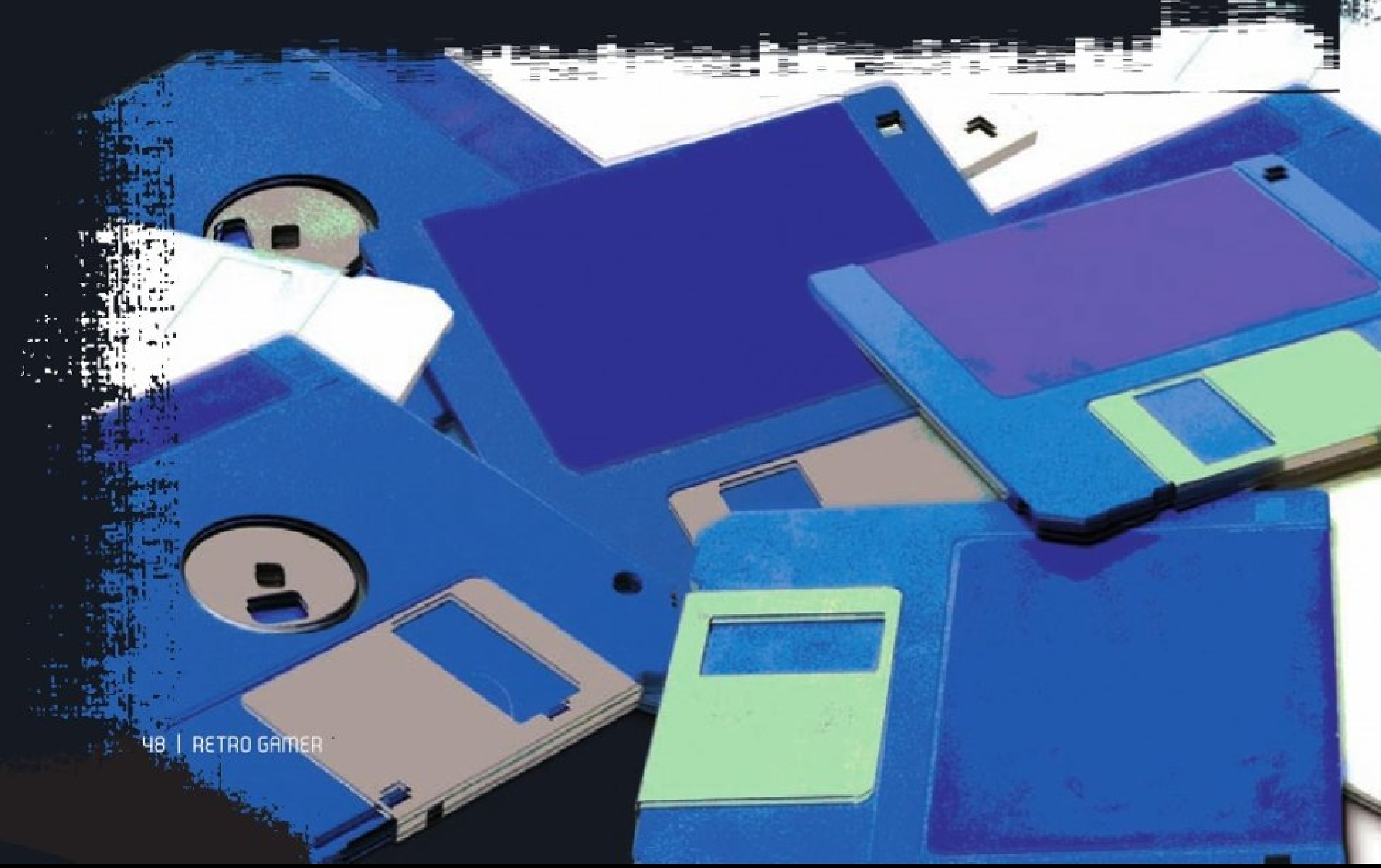
One of the most celebrated innovations in the realm of 'in-world' copy protection was Infocom's 'feelies'. Infocom text adventures came packaged with miscellaneous pieces of extra physical content. Many games contained brilliantly designed collectables, such as the 'zorkmid' that came with *Zork* – an actual minted coin representing the currency of the realm. But in addition, feelies had clues for completing the games, some containing essential information.

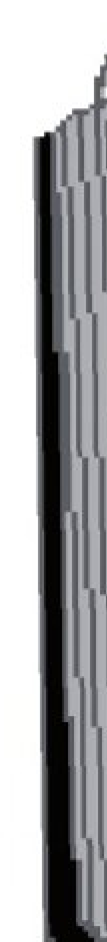
For example, *Zork III* included financial projections and a press release from the 'Frobozz Magic Spell Company'. It reveals four new magic spells released by the company, including 'DRILBO', which "strips a floor of yellow wax"; 'BORCH', which "puts insects to sleep"; and 'QUELBO', which "transmutes coconuts into gold". Hmm… those spells sound oddly specific. We wonder if they'll come in handy?

WHEELY GOOD

Code wheels proved a cheap and popular way of testing whether a player had bought the game, without forcing them to leaf through a dog-eared manual or squint at a series of tiny grid references. They were also pretty cool. Each wheel had gaps through which text showed. The player would have to line up the wheel as directed by on-screen prompts then input the code or words revealed.

A form of code wheel was bundled with EA's text adventure thriller *Amnesia*, where it served as a 'street map' to guide you through Manhattan. Interplay's *Neuromancer*, an adaptation of William Gibson's seminal cyberpunk novel of the same name, similarly employed a code wheel that was integrated into the plot. In the game, you must use the code wheel to



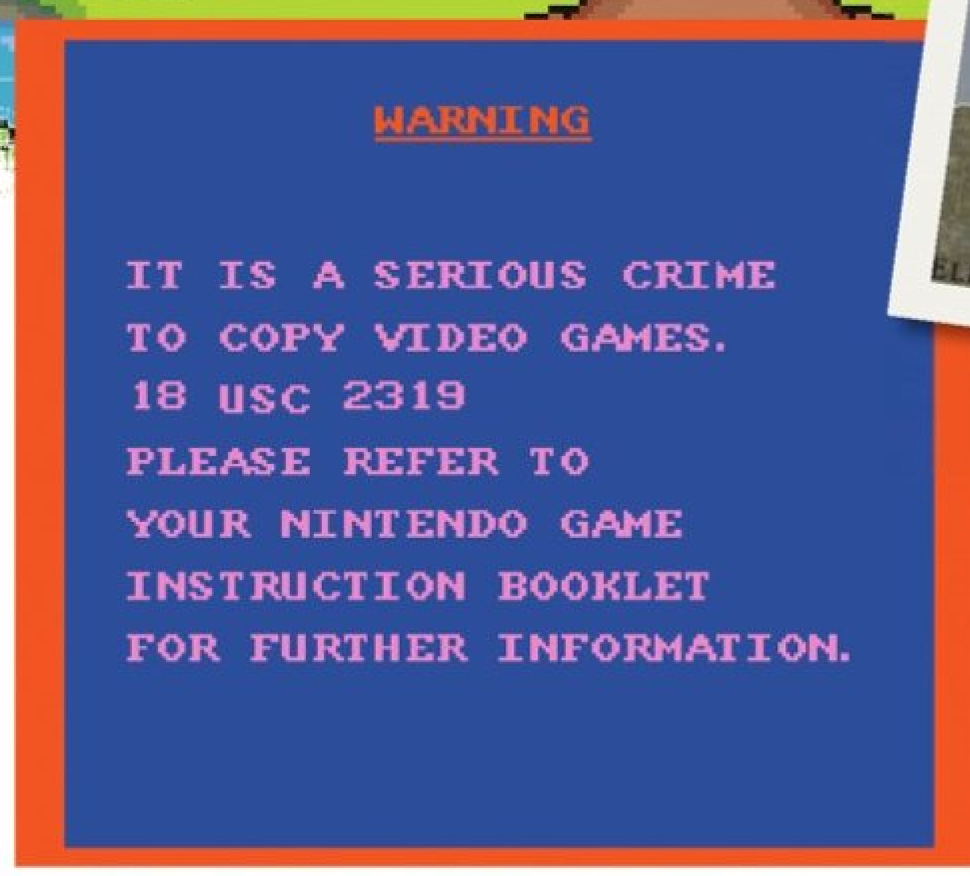












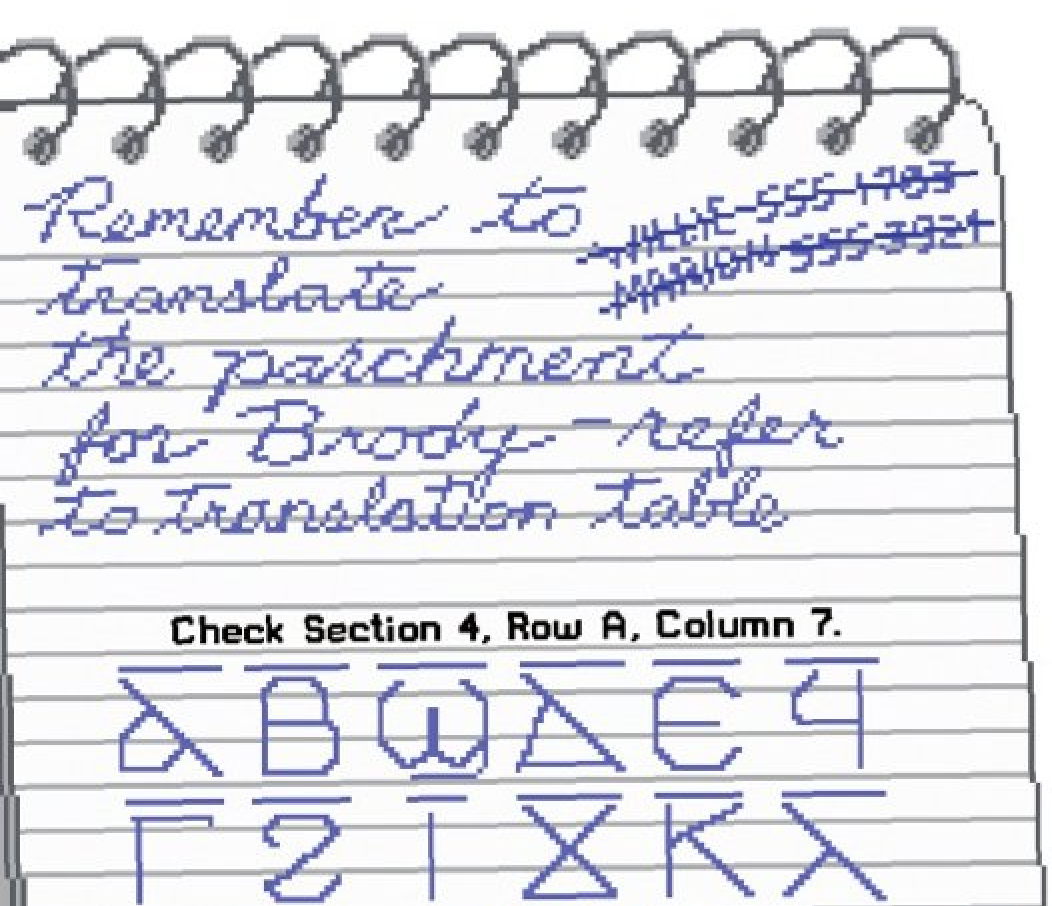
» [SNES] *EarthBound* has some of the most fiendish copy protection of all time.



More Than A Feelie

INFOCOM'S CELEBRATED 'FEELIES' perfectly combined their dual function as serving as a security check while enhancing the realism and immersive nature of the games they came with. In Cold War thriller *Border Zone*, for example, the player has a timetable marked 'Trains From Frzi To Vienna Daily!' The right-hand side is dotted with peculiar symbols that the player will need if they are going to progress.

But, as their name suggests, feelies were often more than straight text. *Seastalker*, a deep ocean exploration game, came with a decoder slide that looked worryingly like the Lenslok frame, but fortunately without its horrendous design flaws. *Leather Goddesses Of Phobos* went one better, including a scratch-and-sniff card with seven number panels. The player was to scratch them when directed, adding one of the only examples of in-game 'smell-o-vision'.



» Who knew Dr Jones had such terrible handwriting?

access PAX terminals at various points in the game and jack into cyberspace. Without it, you cannot progress any further.

Code wheels made for appealing extras, and had an advantage over manuals in that they were very hard to copy. The only way was to dismantle them, or to photocopy the wheel in every possible configuration – a fairly arduous task with some three-ply wheels.

ROTTEN EASTER EGGS

Most forms of copy protection were simple gatehouses meant to keep thieves from playing games that they hadn't paid for. A few notable examples took it one stage further, however. Instead of mere preventative measures, these games had copy protection that aimed to actively frustrate pirates and waste their time. They were the gun-toting Charles Bronsons of the gaming world, finally pushed too far by the endless back-and-forth of defeated countermeasures and cracked security. These games were out for revenge.

Alternate Reality: The City, is a proto-first-person 3D adventure game with a *Matrix*-style storyline, which was released for the Commodore 64, Atari ST and Amiga, among others. The game seemed to allow copies to be made, but when a copied version was played, the player character would quickly begin to weaken from a disease that no healer in the game could cure. This would continue until the character died, without explanation or any clue that it was a result of the game having been pirated.

The sequel, *Alternate Reality: The Dungeon*, was less subtle in punishing thieving players. If you tried to play a copied edition of the game, two super-tough FBI agents would confront you right as you started the game and kill you in battle.

Perhaps the most celebrated example of fiendish yet undeniably poetic hidden copy protection appears in the SNES version of *EarthBound* (*Mother 2* in Japan). The game is an off-the-wall, furiously original RPG starring a psychic, baseball bat-wielding little boy called Ness. Its anti-piracy measures are similarly quirky and inventive.

On startup, if the cartridge detects irregularities indicating that it may be copied, you get a screen with a message that warns: 'It is a serious crime to copy video games.' After that, though, the game then appears to continue as normal. However, all is not as it seems, as throughout the game there are far more bad guys roaming the levels than usual, meaning Ness gets tied down in many, many more random battles. The number of extra enemies makes the game frustratingly hard, but that's not all.

If players can grind their way through the oppressively difficult alternate mode and reach the end of the game, they must confront Gygas, the final boss, who is fighting alongside Ness's spoilt kid neighbour, Pokey. Just as the battle enters its final phase, the game locks up, forcing the player to reset. On restarting the console, the player discovers that all saves have been wiped from the battery backup, with no explanation, no way to recover the hours of lost progress, and no indication that it is caused by the game's copy protection.

Given that you're looking at somewhere in the region of at least 20 hours of frustratingly hard play to get that far, we're guessing that a lot of pirate hair was torn as a result of this sadistic little Easter egg. It's very possible that some gamers grimly soldiered through the game a second time, unaware of what had caused the lock-up, only to have their saves wiped again. 'Ouch' just doesn't quite cover it!

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

IN DEPTH



» Edward's only form of attack is his whip, which he can use to snap at enemies and tether himself to objects.

» The game is jam-packed with epic boss battles. This one sees Edward face off against a giant flying steampunk robot. All sorts of awesome.

» Great use of sprite scaling allows for some memorable set piece moments like this. Incidentally, you might recall a similar boss fight occurring in *Gunstar Heroes* against Sgt Slaughter.



THE CLIFFHANGER: EDWARD RANDY

■ **Developer:** Data East ■ **Year:** 1990 ■ **Genre:** Scrolling beat-'em-up

■ **When a game is known to be a favourite of Treasure character artist HAN, you know it's going to be something really quite special. And this fact alone should serve as a big indicator of how this unconverted title plays: madcap, exhilarating, technically jaw-dropping and harder than Superman's dad – all hallmarks of classic Treasure gaming.**

The Cliffhanger: Edward Randy (*Edward Randy* in Japan) was a 1990 arcade game by Data East. It took its cues from action cinema of the late Eighties and basically plonked players in the best *Indiana Jones* movie to never get made – were Indy played by Sylvester Stallone and the movie written and directed by James Cameron after another of his famous fever dreams.

At its core, *Edward Randy* is a side-scrolling beat-'em-up, but labelling it that is a bit disingenuous. You see, the game makes excellent use of sprite-scaling techniques throughout to make for one insane and dizzying journey.

Armed with a bullwhip, our swashbuckling hero can flog enemies, tether it to objects, and perform a handy 360-degree spin move to attack multiple assailants at once, and every level is packed full of insane action set pieces. One minute Ed's balancing on the hood of a speedboat, whipping his way through a crowd of soldiers; the next he's fighting his way through the exterior of a heavily armoured steampunk-style locomotive before swinging between a squadron of biplanes, battling wing-walking enemies and whipping the face off a giant floating robot head.

But the game isn't perfect, by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, its frenetic pace works against it in many respects. The sheer number of enemies thrown at you, coupled with the slow and inaccurate nature of Edward's whip attack, makes for a somewhat fidgety-feeling game. Minutes in and the gameplay sees you jump from one overblown sequence to the next, smacking at the fire button to vanquish legions of enemies in untidy fashion, while your brain desperately tries to take in all of the colourful on-screen chaos.

It's entirely insane, but then again it's also that high-octane action that hooks you in the first place. Indeed, if we judged videogames on how much they played like white-knuckle rides, this would be the *Citizen Kane* of interactive entertainment. Discovering this gem is a bit like finding out that Treasure has made a 2D version of *Uncharted* but gained permission from Konami to have it star *Castlevania*'s very own whipping boy, Simon Belmont.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM 1985

Owing to the obvious similarities between Edward Randy and Indiana Jones, and the fact that you get to snap a whip, we went with Atari's *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom* videogame adaptation, which did find release on a number of different systems.

THE KARATE TOURNAMENT

■ **Developer:** Mitchell Corporation ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Fighting



» [Arcade] *The Karate Tournament* offers a realistic take on martial arts competition.

■ **After a few minutes play of *The Karate Tournament*, we were decided: this sedate fighting game was getting relegated to the 'best left in the arcade' category. But then something magical happened. We eventually settled with the game's control system, blocked a flurry of attacks from our opponent and then replied in unkind with one of those cool crane kicks from *The Karate Kid*. It was at that point when we started to gel with it, and realised that we may have been a bit rash in our initial judgement.**

The game is a point-based fighter, with rounds won by landing six hits on your opponent. Light connections register a single strike, while more powerful attacks – performed by holding down both fire buttons – award two. The combat system allows the player to block at three height levels by pressing up, back and down on the joystick, and attack by pressing one or both fire buttons, with more moves accessed through a combination of fire button and directional presses.

With a neat control system, and nary a fireball in sight, we think fans of games like *Karate Champ*, *IK+*, and *Way Of The Exploding Fist* will probably find much to like in this composed take on the genre.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

KARATE CHAMP 1984

One of the earliest one-on-one fighting games, *Karate Champ* unsurprisingly also features nothing by way of ridiculous physics-breaking special moves or chin-stroking fist fires; it's just a basic point-based fighting game, pure and simple. It also found release on a handful of systems, including the C64, Apple II and NES.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE



JAMBO! SAFARI 1999

Owing to very similar gameplay, we were tempted to plump for *Stampede*, but arguably the most well-known lassoing simulator came by way of Sega's *Jambo! Safari* in 1999, which received a Wii conversion last year. The game heightens the thrill of the chase by allowing you to tear across the plains of Africa in a jeep.

LASSO

■ **Developer:** SNK ■ **Year:** 1982 ■ **Genre:** Action



» [Arcade] While no classic, *Lasso* is an interesting little score-chasing action game.

■ **A clear case of 'the game is in the name', *Lasso* is a game in which the idea is to capture a series of wayward animals using deft noosing action. You assume the role of a cowboy and must ensure that all the animals on screen are safely returned to their paddock by lassoing them.**

The control system is really straightforward. You move the rancher around the screen, getting him in position, hold down the fire button to release the rope, then when you've let it out enough, you release it again to form a loop. Any animals you successfully ensnare in this loop will be captured. Getting more than one animal inside a loop, which is very tricky, will exponentially raise your score. Trying to scupper your efforts are well-dwelling lizards that spray water, and dogs, which can be vanquished by way of an attack that looks like your little man is lobbing spaghetti bolognese at them. *Lasso* is not an amazing game, but there is something quite charming about it. It's certainly worth a look, especially for fans of *Zoo Keeper* and *Dig Dug II*.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

TERRA FORCE

■ **Developer:** Nichibutsu ■ **Year:** 1987 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

■ **It's the lack of excitement and thrill throughout *Terra Force* – sequel to *Moon Cresta* and the innovative *Terra Cresta* – that landed it here and also likely the reason why this uninspired shooter never found itself a home conversion.**

Terra Force is a pretty staid affair, and all the more so when compared to earlier entries in Nichibutsu's shmup series. While the enemies are varied and plenty, they're just too random and dull in their design to make you care about shooting them. Further issues arise from the weapon system, which is equally uninspired, and the fact that there are no impressive mayors with whom to trade fire. Your air-to-ground missiles are mainly pointless, given that you can shoot ground targets with your main cannon anyway. And while we like how the levels switch perspectives, the final nail in the coffin was the misstep in level design, which we found confusing owing to enemy ships and floating debris forming part of the backgrounds.



LICENCE TO KILL

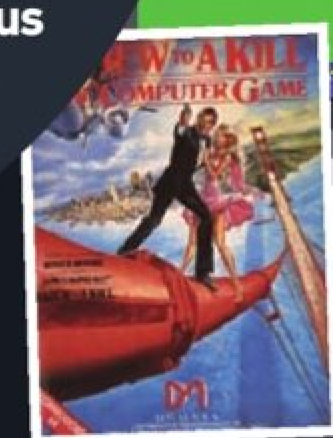


The Complete History of James Bond games

It might be the longest-running film franchise in history, but by the end of this year, unless something really quite improbable happens – like an evil genius decides to suddenly wipe out the entire gaming industry using an N-Gage satellite – James Bond will have officially appeared in more videogames than he has films. But even though most of Bond's interactive missions have left us decidedly more shaken than stirred, we thought we'd mark this arguably amazing milestone by playing through all of James's previous videogame missions. Actually, we just fancied playing some GoldenEye…







A View To A Kill: The Computer Game

- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **PUBLISHER:** DOMARK
- **DEVELOPER:** SOFTSTONE (CPC VERSION – THE SOFTWARE TECHNICIANS)
- **FORMAT:** 2600, 5200, COLECOVISION, C64, MSX

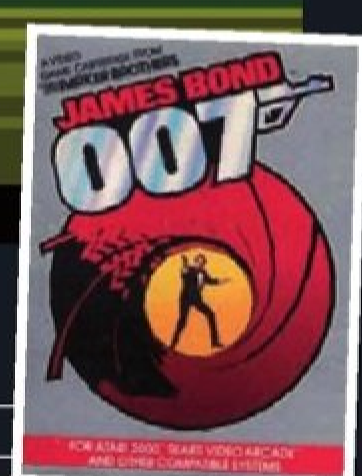
Released in 1985, *A View To A Kill* marks the first of six mediocre *Bond* games that were published by the Brit software house Domark.

Taking Parker's lead, Domark also decided to split the action up into a series of mini-games, this time keeping things simpler by basing them all on scenes from a single movie. The first section saw Bond chasing down Mayday as she makes her escape from the Eiffel Tower using a parachute, and took the form of a clunky driving game that was divided between two simultaneous perspectives: top-down and into-the-screen faux 3D. Driving a taxi, Bond must race around Paris to catch the assassin while battling changing wind direction, police blockades, civilian vehicles and the city's madcap one-way system.

The second section saw Bond escaping a burning San Francisco City Hall. Set within a play area comprising a grid of 75 rooms, and with the action viewed from a pseudo-3D viewpoint similar to *Spy vs Spy*, Bond had to rescue Stacey Sutton and then find a way to escape. Despite the tense backdrop, the bland visuals and clunky inventory mar any enjoyment. The final section was a naff *Pitfall!* meets *Impossible Mission* romp set in Zorin's mine, in which Bond must locate code numbers to defuse a bomb, which, if it detonates, will cause an earthquake in Silicon Valley.

To say that *A View To A Kill*'s visuals are uglier than Blofeld doing butt crunches in hot pants is actually being kind. Frustrating bugs and poor visuals make this one of the worst games to ever brandish the licence.



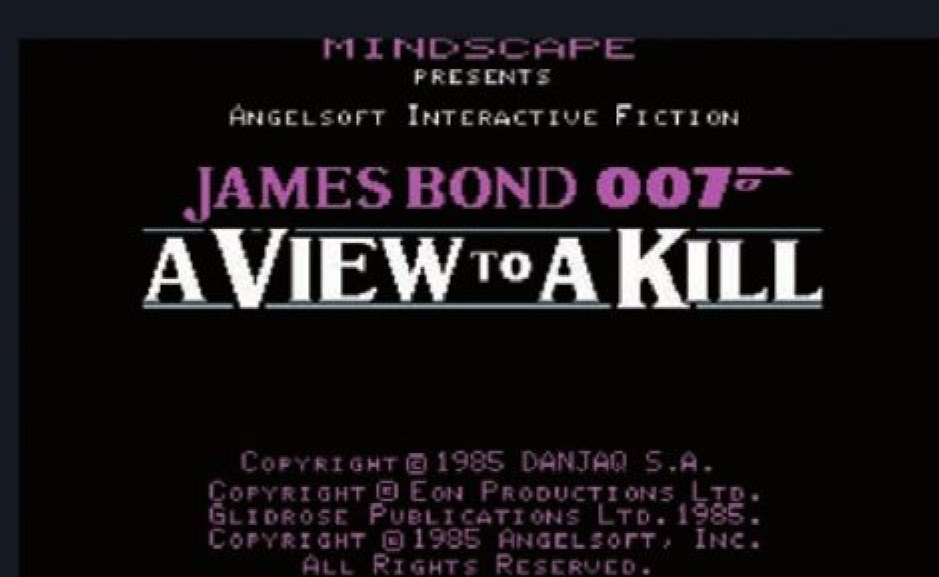


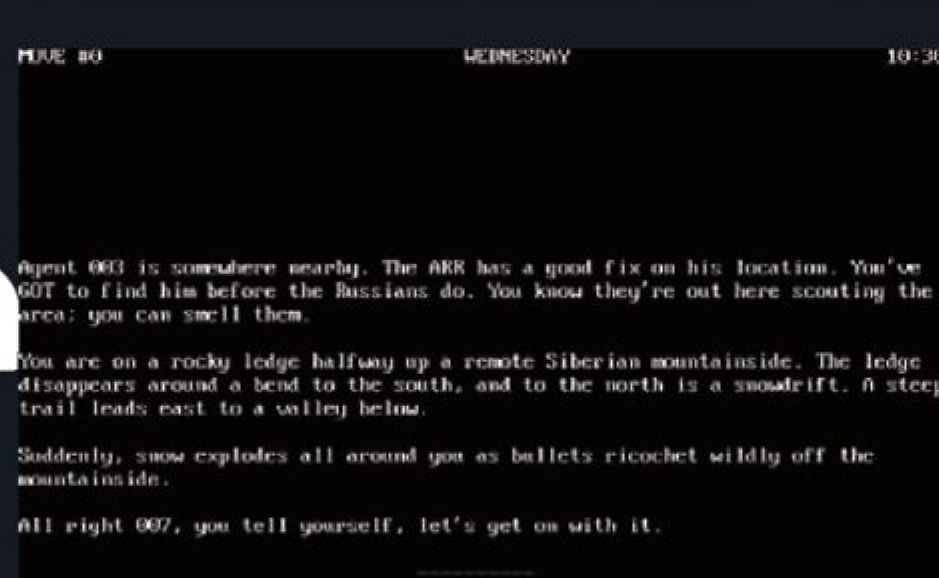
James Bond 007

- **RELEASED:** 1983
- **PUBLISHER:** PARKER BROTHERS
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **FORMAT:** 2600, 5200, COLECOVISION, C64

Not surprisingly, given the popularity of the character, the first ever *Bond* game to see release was on popular consoles and computers in the US. *James Bond 007* was developed by Parker Brothers, which was also responsible for bringing the first official *Star Wars* game, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* on the 2600, to our screens.

Given that the film franchise was 12 movies old by the time of the game's release, Parker decided to ambitiously base its game on four *Bond* films. Despite each film's wildly differing plot, the game admirably wraps them all up inside a side-scrolling vehicle shooter, in the style of Irem's *Moon Patrol*. The game sees Bond embarking on a weird tour of his four missions from inside his Lotus Esprit fish car from *The Spy Who Loved Me*, which, for some reason, now has the ability to jump. During the game's four stages, Bond must reach, find and board Blofeld's oil rig base while avoiding the villain's diamond-powered satellites (*Diamonds Are Forever*), blow villain Drax's toxin-filled spheres out of the sky while shooting down launching Moonraker shuttles (*Moonraker*, obviously), avoid nuclear submarines and divers while getting Stromberg in his underwater hideaway (*The Spy Who Loved Me*), and finally raid a sunken fishing trawler, St Georges, to recover the military communication device, ATAC (*For Your Eyes Only*). This ambitious first outing does a decent job, but its frustrating difficulty lets it down.







James Bond 007: A View To A Kill

- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **PUBLISHER:** MINDSCAPE
- **DEVELOPER:** ANGELSOFT
- **FORMAT:** APPLE II, PC

In the same year that Domark's three-part action unspectacular was released, Mindscape produced this text adventure game based on *A View To A Kill*. Thanks to some excellent writing by Raymond Benson, this little-known *Bond* mission was, thankfully, much better than Domark's effort, and actually does a great job of capturing the feel of classic Ian Fleming Bond. However, we do suggest watching the movie before pondering a playthrough, as the first half includes some fiendish puzzles that you'll only ever crack by watching the film and mimicking Roger Moore's on-screen actions. That said, the latter half of the game then adds its own plotlines anyway, making this a somewhat confused, but nevertheless enjoyable, game.

The Living Daylights: The Computer Game

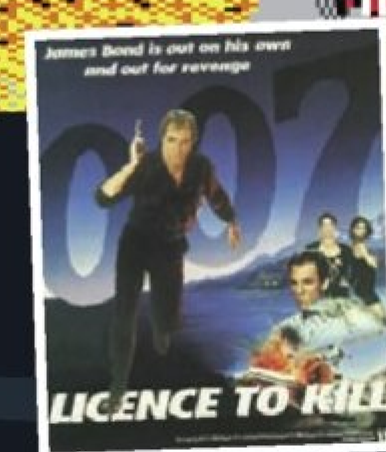
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **PUBLISHER:** DOMARK
- **DEVELOPER:** SCULPTURED SOFTWARE (C64), DE RE SOFTWARE (ATARI), WALKING CIRCLES (SPECTRUM)
- **FORMAT:** AMIGA, CPC, C64, SPECTRUM, MSX, PC, ATARI 800, BBC

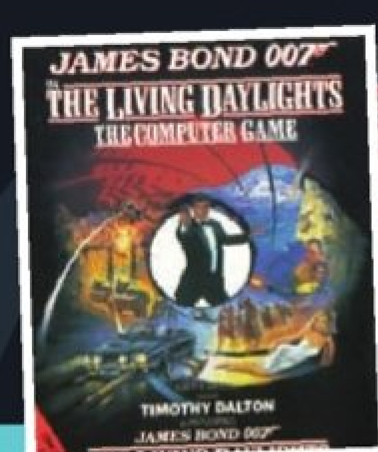
Clearly learning its lesson from the unfavourable reviews of *A View To A Kill*, Domark's second *Bond* game, *The Living Daylights*, was a vast visual improvement. Furthermore, realising that it was shooting a little high with *A View To A Kill*'s three-games-in-one approach, the developer stripped the gameplay back, delivering a straightforward side-scrolling shooter.

The game follows the plot of the film but relies largely on locations to guide the player through the story. On the trail of the international arms dealer Brad Whitaker, Bond must run and gun his way through eight levels, dodging bullets, rocks, sticks and even exploding milk bottles while shooting at enemies. The gameplay is akin to the ambidextrous gunplay of games like *NAM-1975* and *Cabal*, but not as good. Between stages, Bond gets to visit Q and pick new contraptions to assist him, which makes this the first *Bond* game to properly introduce gadgets.

The game's packaging states that Domark's *The Living Daylights* was based on an arcade game by Arcadia Systems, but we've not been able to find any proof that such a game existed. Our intelligence, however, has revealed that Arcadia Systems, a coin-op subsidiary of Mastertronic, produced a number of arcade games based on Amiga hardware, so it's feasible that a game was produced and laughed out of arcades for being rubbish.











Licence To Kill

- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **PUBLISHER:** DOMARK
- **DEVELOPER:** QUIXEL
- **FORMAT:** AMIGA, CPC, C64, SPECTRUM, ATARI ST AND PC, NES (UNRELEASED)

Domark's fourth *Bond* game was without doubt its best. Getting the formula almost right this time, *Licence To Kill* is a top-down run-and-gun vehicle shooter, a template that later *Bond* games would follow. It also follows the film's plot quite closely. *Licence To Kill* gained positive reviews on its release, with many magazines praising its visuals, presentation, the variety of its levels, and the use of varied vehicles, which also became a trope of subsequent *Bond* games from other developers. The game was designed on the PC and later ported to other systems. A NES conversion by Tengen was also planned but never released.

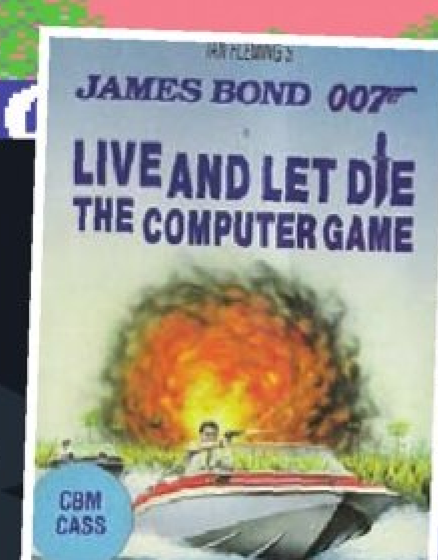
Live And Let Die: The Computer Game

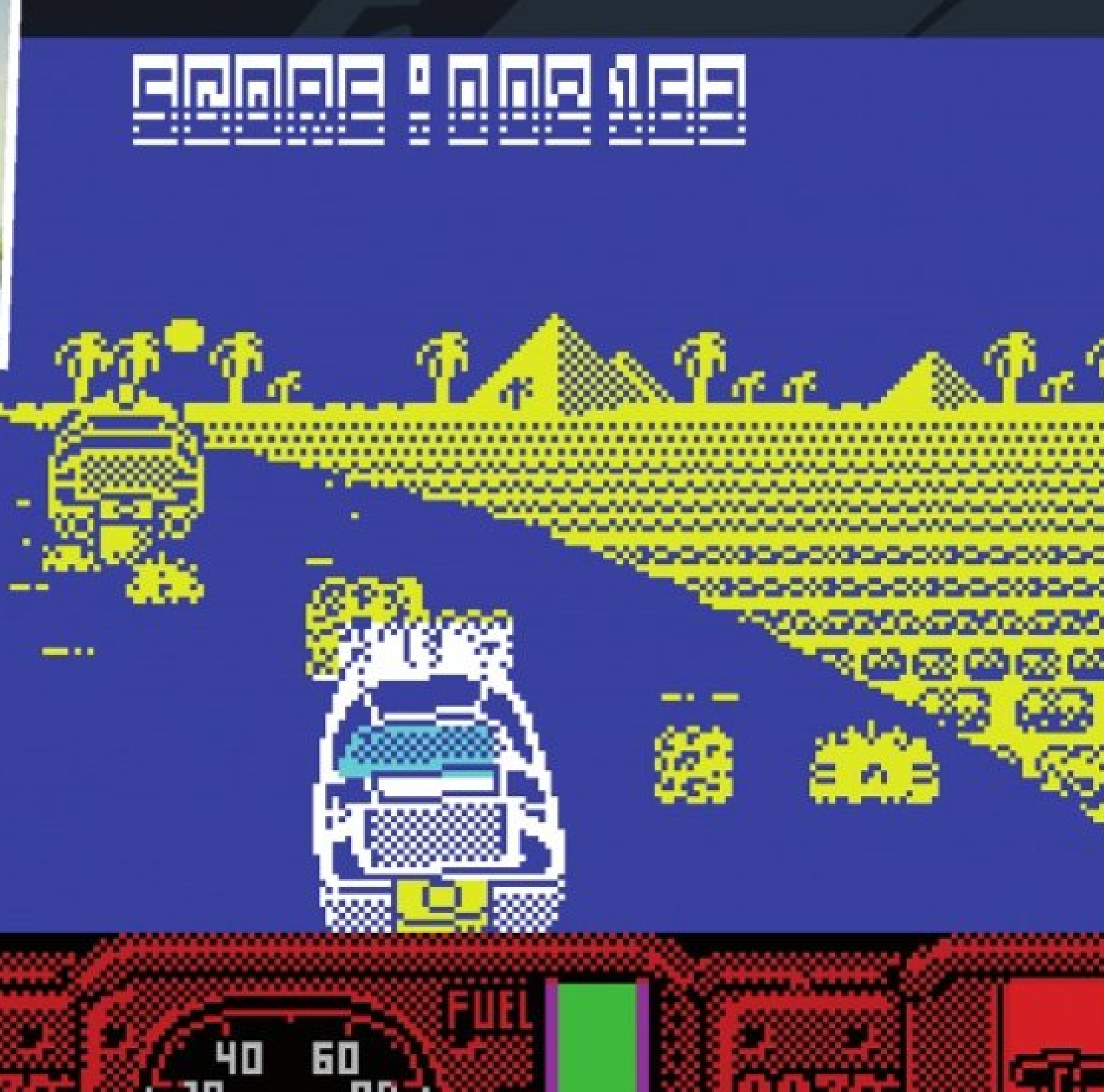
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **PUBLISHER:** DOMARK
- **DEVELOPER:** ELITE SYSTEMS INTERNATIONAL, KEYPUNCH (AMIGA)
- **FORMAT:** AMIGA, CPC, C64, SPECTRUM, ATARI ST

Of all the *Bond* games from Domark, *Live And Let Die* has the most interesting back story. Written by Elite Systems, the game was actually a re-skin of another game that the software house had in development: *Aquablaster*, a spiritual successor to the company's popular *Buggy Boy* C64 port. But when Domark had concerns about the quality of its in-house effort, and realised that Elite's game could be tenuously linked to a single scene in *Live And Let Die*, it published the game and ordered that Elite retrofit it with enemies and graphics more in keeping with a *Bond* game.

While *Live And Let Die* is regarded as one of the better Domark *Bond* games, it is the most liberal with plot details. Of the four levels, only one is actually a true mission. The first three are presented as training exercises designed to help Bond get acquainted with his new vehicle.

To prep him for his mission, Bond must avoid obstacles such as mines, rocks, gun emplacements and boats, and instead of protecting a life gauge must ensure that he keeps fuel in his tank. The final mission ends with Bond destroying Mr Big's heroin factory with the aid of a piece of driftwood and a timely missile.







The Spy Who Loved Me

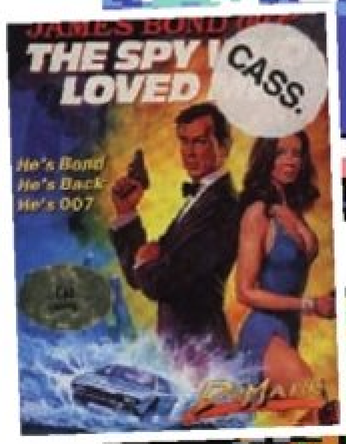
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **PUBLISHER:** DOMARK
- **DEVELOPER:** THE KREMLIN
- **FORMAT:** AMIGA, CPC, C64, SPECTRUM, ATARI ST, PC

Given that James Bond was clearly a big influence on Midway's *Spy Hunter*, it's forgivable that this Domark title decided to pay homage back. *The Spy Who Loved Me* marks the first time that Domark would look to a previous *Bond* episode to base a game upon. This was likely due to the poor box office returns of *Licence To Kill* and subsequent legal squabble that ensued over who held the *Bond* rights, which caused a long cinema hiatus. Given the success of the *Licence To Kill* videogame, Domark understandably wanted to cash in on the licence, but with no new *Bond* movie to base a new game on, it was forced to sift through the back catalogue instead.

For the majority of conversions, *The Spy Who Loved Me* is entirely vehicle-based. Its gameplay borrows heavily from top-down racers like *Road Fighter* and *Spy Hunter*. Like the latter, Bond begins in his white Lotus for the on-road sections, switching it for a speedboat and wet bike for the water stages, as well as a mission that sees his car transform into a submarine for an underwater *Xenon 2*-style stage.

And the *Spy Hunter* similarities didn't end there. The game also saw Bond entering Q's truck during the stage, where inside he could upgrade and make repairs to his vehicle through the collection of coins – a novel idea but one that actually adds little to the game.

Ultimately, like most of the Domark games, it's *The Spy Who Loved Me*'s poor controls that let it down. The vehicles' overly skittish steering, coupled with some frustrating level design, makes for another ultimately flawed outing for Bond. The PC, Amiga and ST versions, though, are notable for not only featuring better visuals, sound and presentation but for also adding additional stages, including a level in which Bond has to hack a computer to stop a missile launch, an *Operation Wolf*-style section where you have to protect Bond, and a climatic gunfight with Bond's metal-mouthed adversary, Jaws, and Stromberg. It also has two endings.











James Bond Jr

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHER:** THQ
- **DEVELOPER:** GRAY MATTER (SNES), EUROCOM (NES)
- **FORMAT:** SNES, NES

Based on a short-lived but apparently pretty popular American animated kids' television series, itself influenced by an unsuccessful spin-off *Bond* novel for kids, which saw Bond's preppy nephew, who is also named James, in the role of protagonist. THQ got in on some *Bond* gaming action through the back door when it snapped up the videogame rights to the telly show and published two games with the licence. The most recognised is the game that appeared on the SNES. Developed by Gray Matter, *James Bond Jr* was a forgettable side-scrolling platform game that was aimed squarely at kids. The game's basic animations, peculiar gadgets, plus roster of very un-*Bond*-style enemies – including bats, Aztec warriors, snakes and monkeys – make this feel like a *Bond* game by association only. The NES version, which was developed by Eurocom – remember this name – is actually a surprisingly decent run-and-gun puzzle platformer in the vein of *Switchblade*.



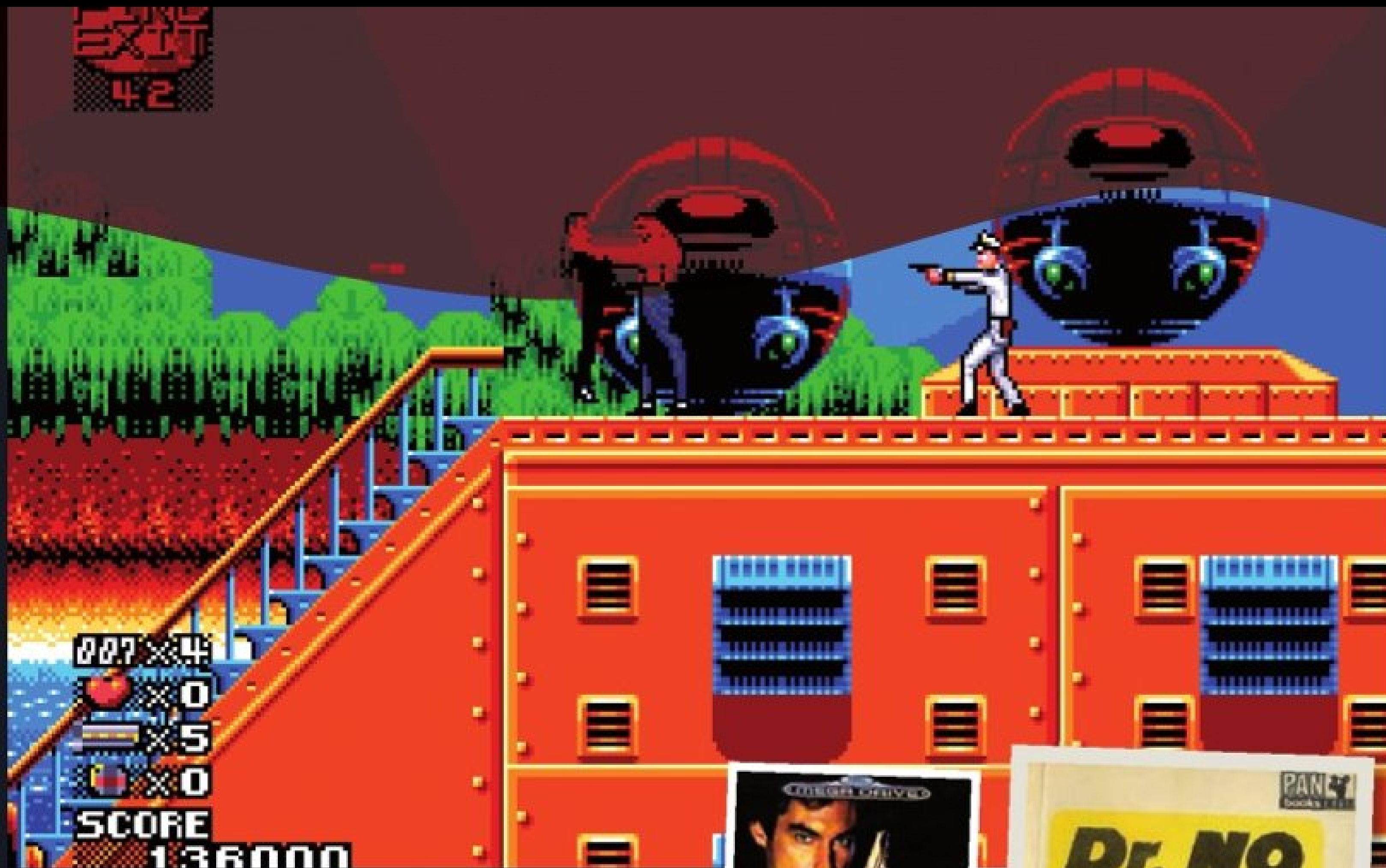
Operation Stealth (aka James Bond 007: The Stealth Affair)

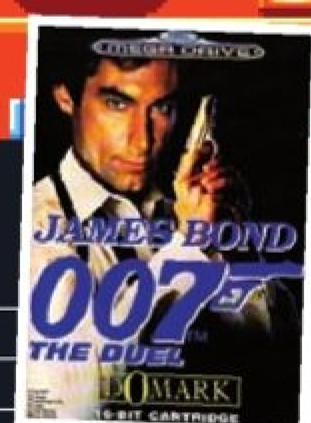
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **PUBLISHER:** INTERPLAY
- **DEVELOPER:** DELPHINE SOFTWARE
- **FORMAT:** AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC

This point-and-click adventure game by Delphine Software and successor to *Future Wars* is only considered a Bond game in the US – in Europe and the rest of the world the game's secret agent is named John Glames. Using a simple pop-up verb interface that allowed you to converse with characters and manipulate objects, the game is reminiscent of classic LucasArts and Sierra adventure games. With its colourful cartoon visuals, varied locales, frequent *Bond* references, and arcade mini-games seasoning all the pointing and clicking, *Operation Stealth* is a decent adventure title with or without the *Bond* name attached. It's also notable for being the first *Bond* game to be based on an entirely original story, whereas previous titles were based on a movie or one of Fleming's novels.









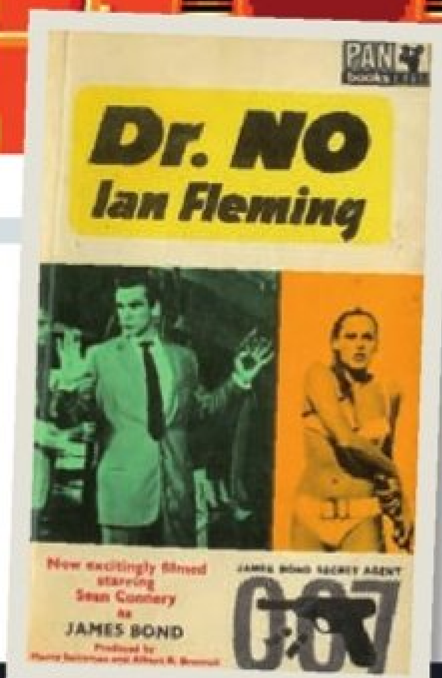
James Bond 007: The Duel

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** DOMARK
- **DEVELOPER:** THE KREMLIN
- **FORMAT:** MEGA DRIVE, MASTER SYSTEM

While THQ would briefly get in on the *Bond* act through the assistance of a cartoon, Domark still held the official videogame licence. However, with a legal dispute stopping any new *Bond* movies, the publisher asked developer The Kremlin to come up with its own original story to base a game around. The result was *James Bond 007: The Duel*, a game that saw Bond battle past enemies in a linear side-scrolling run-and-gun game similar to Namco's *Rolling Thunder*.

The game featured just five levels, and all followed a clear template based on *Bond* staples: rescue a set number of blonde Bond girls, find a bomb hidden somewhere on the stage, set the detonator and locate the exit before it explodes. While *The Duel* certainly looks good, like all Domark games it's the controls that let it down. There are also some laughable throwaway encounters with classic villains, which does make it feel like a bit of a parody at points – especially with the game's Timothy Dalton sprite jumping around like a flea dressed in a tuxedo.





Brief history of James Bond… the actual fictional character

When Ian Fleming wrote *Casino Royale* in 1953, one of literature's most popular heroes was born. But it was when the stories spiked the interest of film producers Harry Saltzman and Albert R Broccoli that Bond became a true cultural icon. When the canny duo acquired the rights and set about adapting Fleming's tales into feature films, starting with *Dr No* in 1962, the British secret agent quickly became the most recognised, most profitable, and longest-running British film franchise ever.

Of course, like any popular character, Bond's success and popularity didn't stop there. As well as movies and videogames, Bond has appeared in television and radio plays, been spoofed in countless films – notably the *Austin Powers* movies – and has also appeared in comic strips, including a guest appearance in Alan Moore's *League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen: The Dark Dossier*, where an alternate version of the character plays a womanising villain.





GoldenEye 007

- **RELEASED:** 1997
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** RARE
- **FORMAT:** N64

To say there weren't many betting on Rare's *GoldenEye 007* being a success is no exaggeration. An FPS for a console, a control system that didn't utilise a mouse, and a movie tie-in coming two years after the release of the movie – receiving very little in the way of marketing push as a result. Yet despite all this, *GoldenEye 007* went on to became one of the most influential console games ever released.

Originally announced for the Super Nintendo, before its development settled on the N64, it blended together elements of, according to designer Martin Hollis, *Virtua Cop*, *Mario 64* and *Doom* to create one of Bond's best-loved interactive missions. *GoldenEye 007* was a marvellous marriage of ideas and design that marked a big jump in tech from previous outings. Gone was the 8-bit era of *Bond*, where he was represented by an indistinguishable sprite that could be any one of the actors that have played the spy. It had great visuals, faithful level designs that extended those key scenes in the movie, a story that mirrored the film brilliantly, groundbreaking enemy AI, and fantastic controls. It allowed players to manoeuvre the firing hand of Bond, rather than the gun, to offer a real sense of precision and control that worked especially well in those missions that called for a bit of stealth. *GoldenEye 007* marked a significant turning point for the franchise, and saw the spy's virtual outings become as popular and anticipated as those on the big screen. Of course, solidifying its cult status and appeal further was one of the most addictive, fun and satisfying multiplayer components ever conceived. Little wonder that it's the bestselling *Bond* game of all time.



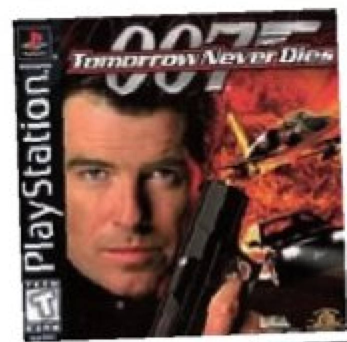
James Bond 007

- **RELEASED:** 1998
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** SAFFIRE CORPORATION
- **FORMAT:** GAME BOY

Despite what its title implies, this isn't a port of the earlier Parker Brothers title but is actually an original game and the second of three *Bond* titles that Nintendo had planned to publish – the third was a *GoldenEye* game for the Virtual Boy that never saw the living daylights. This top-down *Zelda*-style action-RPG was a great example of the *Bond* licence being put to good use on limited hardware. Boasting detailed visuals, a variety of gadgets and weapons, familiar foes to fight, and a credible story that saw Bond jet-setting around the globe to discover the whereabouts of a missing fellow agent, this title packs everything you could ever want from a classic *Bond* game. It also gives you the chance to see Bond spend his obscene wages in a casino and even allows you to flirt with Moneypenny too – surely worth the asking price alone.





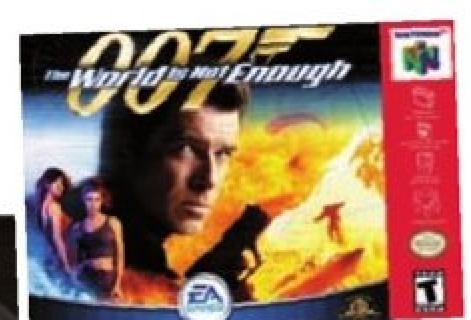


Tomorrow Never Dies

■ **RELEASED:** 1999
■ **PUBLISHER:** EA
■ **DEVELOPER:** BLACK OPS
■ **FORMAT:** PLAYSTATION



Following the triumph of *GoldenEye 007*, the *Bond* licence became understandably sought after, and in 1999 Electronic Arts purchased the game rights with the hope of re-creating that success with its film-to-videogame follow-up, *Tomorrow Never Dies*. However, it failed to garner the same critical and domestic acclaim, and this was due to a number of reasons. Chief among them was the switch from first to third-person and the rumour that the game was rushed through production, and when you consider the game's unkempt, jaggy visuals, shallow draw distances, occasional glitches, awkward control system and the puzzling lack of a multiplayer mode, it's a probable scenario, made even more feasible when you consider the late gestation of *GoldenEye 007*. With filming for *Tomorrow Never Dies* wrapped up around the same time that Rare was putting the finishing touches to *GoldenEye*, EA and Black Ops were forced to play catch-up. Although *TND* features some nice ideas, such as a ski level and a stage that saw you play Bond girl Wai Lin, it ultimately falls way short of living up to the quality of Rare's seminal game.



The World Is Not Enough

■ **RELEASED:** 2000
■ **PUBLISHER:** EA
■ **DEVELOPER:** EUROCOM (N64), BLACK OPS (PSONE)
■ **FORMAT:** N64, PLAYSTATION, GBC



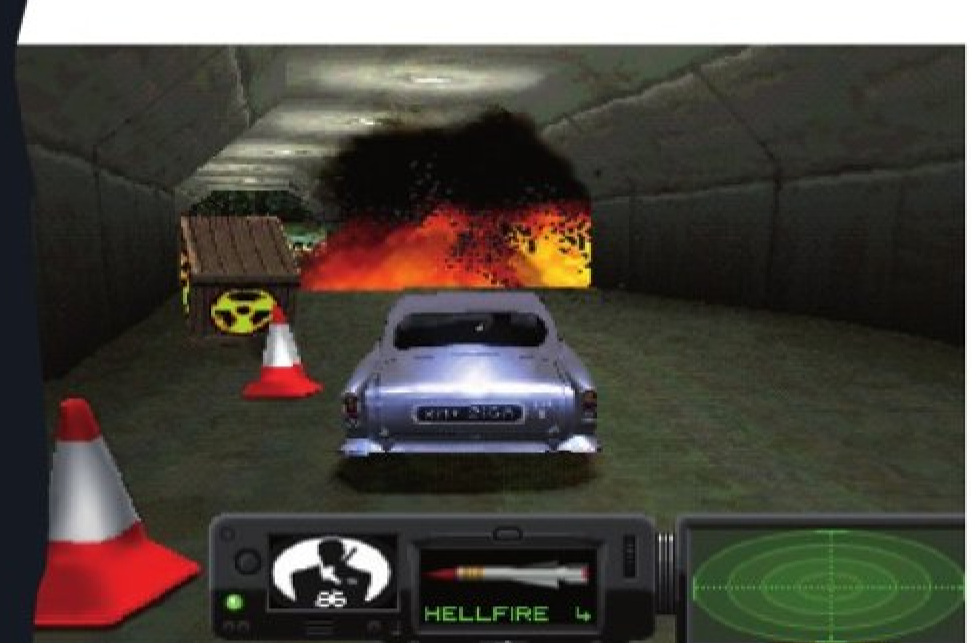
Following the disappointment of *Tomorrow Never Dies*, EA came to a pretty obvious conclusion: fans wanted more FPS Bond. Rethinking its strategy, it set about creating a true successor to *GoldenEye 007*. The result, *The World Is Not Enough*, actually marked another series high point. Two versions were developed: one for the PlayStation by Black Ops, and another for the N64 by Eurocom, which had previously produced that decent *James Bond Jr* game on the NES. Both games were first-person shooters, with the PlayStation iteration running on EA's *Medal Of Honor* engine. The two versions do vary, however. Many of the levels and their layouts differ between ports. The N64 iteration also features a further three stages, and the PSone version is again lacking a multiplayer mode – despite the fact that *Medal Of Honor* proved that it could be done on the console. The levels are nicely designed, there are plenty of new gadgets, and the missions and overall look of the game harks back to the 1997 N64 classic. It's the small details, though, that expose it as an imitator to the crown. The controls simply don't feel as responsive, the AI not as clever, nor the multiplayer as varied or entertaining. Nevertheless, *The World Is Not Enough* remains a decent successor to the classic N64 shooter and another solid *Bond* game from Eurocom.



007 Racing

■ **RELEASED:** 2000
■ **PUBLISHER:** EA
■ **DEVELOPER:** EUTECHNYX
■ **FORMAT:** PLAYSTATION

With two lacklustre PlayStation *Bond* games done, EA rethought how best to approach it on Sony's machine. If there's one genre that sold like hot fish cakes to starving penguins on the PlayStation it's racing games, and with vehicles playing such a key role in the *Bond* movies, *007 Racing* made perfect sense. It allowed fans to sit behind the wheel of some of the spy's most memorable vehicles and take them for a spin in a *Driver*-style racing game, but the idea was squandered. *007 Racing* looked poor, and its gameplay suffered from frustrating combat, spongy handling and slow-paced missions.



The Spy Who Influenced Me



Spy Hunter - 1983 - Bally Midway
Driving a souped-up white G-6155 Interceptor, players had to negotiate a treacherous stretch of tarmac full of enemy agents and hapless Sunday drivers. As revealed back in issue 66, *Spy Hunter*'s creators were big *Bond* fans, and it certainly shows. Probably the best *Bond* homage ever.



Sly Spy - 1989 - Data East
This game is such a barefaced *Bond* rip-off that you can't help but wonder how Data East actually got away with *Sly Spy*. This pastiche allows you to give yourself a 00 codename, features its own version of the Golden Gun, and has stages ending in fights against spoofs of famous *Bond* villains too.



The Super Spy - 1990 - SNK
Before *GoldenEye*, SNK was plonking us in the eye sockets of a secret agent in *The Super Spy*. You play Roy Heart, a CIA agent who must fight his way through an office block overrun by terrorists in weird costumes. It's an unusual game made bearable by a fun combat system.



Rolling Thunder - 1986 - Namco
This challenging side-scrolling shooter saw players assume the role of secret agent Albatross as he tried to rescue a fellow agent from a goblin-headed evil mastermind. *Rolling Thunder*'s action was split between two planes and borrowed *Elevator Action*'s love for opening doors.





James Bond 007: Agent Under Fire

- **RELEASED:** 2001
- **PUBLISHER:** EA
- **DEVELOPER:** EA CANADA
- **FORMAT:** XBOX, PS2, GC

Thankfully the next *Bond* game from EA was a vast improvement. *Agent Under Fire*, which marked the first time EA would opt to develop a *Bond* game in-house, was based on an entirely new story, in which Bond – not depicted in the game as Brosnan, but a character who looks a bit like him – works alongside a female CIA agent to stop a scientist from killing eight world leaders and replacing them with clones. The game is a mix of FPS in the style of *GoldenEye 007* and *The World Is Not Enough*, but far more linear in its approach, with vastly improved vehicle bits clearly lifted from *007 Racing*. The game also featured a heavier emphasis on gadgets and introduced 'Bond Moves' to the mix as well. These were a series of optional real-time action scenarios, or achievements, that earned players more points upon completion of a level. In turn, these would also unlock special items and weapons for Bond in the game.

James Bond 007: Nightfire

- **RELEASED:** 2002
- **PUBLISHER:** EA
- **DEVELOPER:** EUROCOM, GEARBOX (PC), ASPYR (MAC)
- **FORMAT:** PS2, XBOX, GC, PC, MAC, GBA

Nightfire is easily the best *Bond* game to come from the EA era. Hugging close to the template of *Agent Under Fire*, *Nightfire* refined the FPS/driving formula but benefits from improved visuals and better level design. It also had a better story too, which shared parallels with the plot of *Moonraker* – just supplant space shuttles with nuclear missiles – and featured 'official' Brosnan, and a greatly improved multiplayer mode, featuring maps based on areas seen in classic *Bond* movies. The home computer version, from Gearbox, differed from its console counterpart. It omitted vehicle sections in favour of more FPS stages and bolting on a far less enjoyable multiplayer mode that lacked many of the options of the decent console ports.



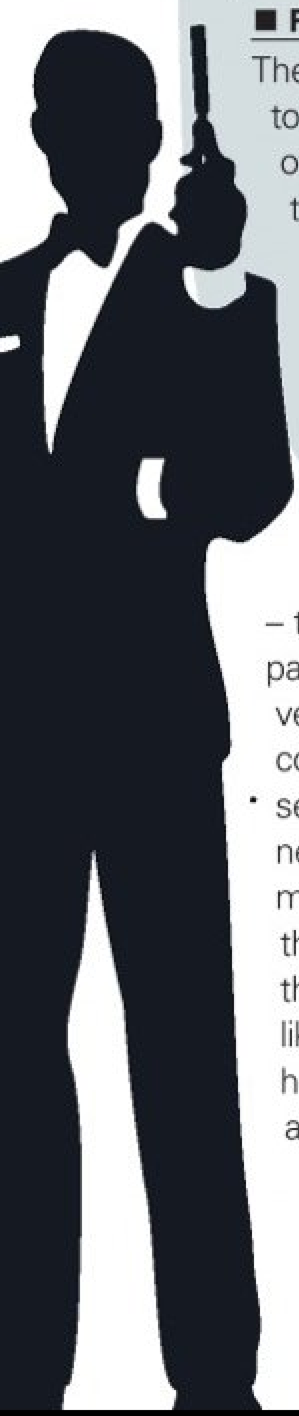
James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing

- **RELEASED:** 2004
- **PUBLISHER:** EA
- **DEVELOPER:** EA REDWOOD SHORES (XBOX, PS2), GRIPTONITE GAMES (GBA)
- **FORMAT:** XBOX, PS2, GC, GBA

The next *Bond* game saw a return to the third-person perspective of *Tomorrow Never Dies*, this time for a stealth cover shooter based on an all-new story scribed by Bond screenwriter Bruce Feirstein (*GoldenEye*, *The World Is Not Enough*). Kicking things off with a nice preamble mission before the opening credits appear – a staple of *Bond* cinema – the game retains an impressive pace throughout through various vehicles, multiple ways to complete your missions, nice set piece moments, and a fancy new Jason Bourne-style fisticuffs mechanic. It's also worth noting that many film actors also lent their voices to their videogame likenesses, including Brosnan, helping make this the slickest of all EA's *Bond* titles.







GoldenEye: Rogue Agent

- **RELEASED:** 2004
- **PUBLISHER:** EA
- **DEVELOPER:** EA LOS ANGELES
- **FORMAT:** XBOX, PS2, XBOX, DS

As its title suggests, *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent* was EA's most blatant attempt to cash in on *GoldenEye 007*'s success. This is evident not only in its name but also its heavy emphasis on multiplayer gaming, which also supported online.

Rogue Agent's barmy retcon plot saw you playing the role of a disgraced MI6 agent, who accidentally kills James Bond during a training exercise. As a result of his incompetence, he is promptly kicked out of MI6 and decides to become a turncoat, working for Auric Goldfinger. Gifted a power-laden golden eye for his services – eventually giving him the power to see through brick walls, hack computers, unleash a weird telekinesis attack, and get lamely referred to as 'GoldenEye' during the game – *Rogue Agent*'s befuddling plot actually finds the agent crossing paths with classic and previously dead villains, including Scaramanga, Dr No, and even *GoldenEye*'s Xenia Onatopp.

Sadly, the game shares very little common ground with the N64 classic, however, and once again it comes across as another poor imitator. EA also overcompensates for criticisms levied at the easy difficulty of its previous *Bond* games by seemingly deliberately making *Rogue Agent* a pig to finish. Lengthy stages, eagle-eyed sharp-shooting enemies, and tough bosses are the main culprits.



From Russia With Love

■ **RELEASED:** 2005
■ **PUBLISHER:** EA
■ **DEVELOPER:** EA REDWOOD SHORES
■ **FORMAT:** XBOX, PS2, GC, PSP

From Russia With Love marked an odd swansong for publisher EA, but there is a simple explanation as to why the publisher looked to a classic *Bond* story for its final game. It originally started life as a new *Bond* game starring Pierce Brosnan, but when MGM made the announcement in 2005 that actor Daniel Craig would be taking over as 007, EA was forced to rethink, and *From Russia With Love*, a retelling of the classic movie and novel with Sean Connery reprising his role as the suave secret agent – the actor also lent his voice to the game – was the result. Following the success of *Everything Or Nothing*, and the disappointing reaction to *Rogue Agent*, EA returned to the tried-and-tested formula of third-person shooter mingled with vehicle missions. *From Russia With Love* is a solid game, and the chance to play as Connery will certainly be a draw for fans. The only criticism is that the action feels a little sedate at times, especially when compared to the action-packed likes of *GoldenEye 007* and *Everything Or Nothing*, though EA does try to intensify things by including the jet pack from *Thunderball* and the DB5 from *Goldfinger* for use in certain missions. You could also argue that this sedate feel has more to do with the Cold War era in which the game is set. And, to be honest, having Bond appear in ridiculous action set pieces would have been a little bit jarring to the source material and would have caused Sean Connery to turn in his grave… if he was dead, of course.





Quantum Of Solace

■ **RELEASED:** 2008
■ **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
■ **DEVELOPER:** TREYARCH
■ **FORMAT:** 360, PS3, PS2, WII, DS, PC

Following the disappointment of *Rogue Agent*, and the bumpy production of *From Russia With Love*, which led to a late and eventually aborted *Casino Royale* game that reputedly cost MGM millions in potential licence revenue, EA decided to part ways with the *Bond* licence and look to concentrate on generating unique new properties instead.

In 2006 it was announced that Activision had struck a deal with MGM and EON Productions to acquire the rights to publish future *Bond* games. The first to come from that deal was 2008's *Quantum Of Solace*, a tie-in starring current James Bond actor Daniel Craig. Despite being called *Quantum Of Solace*, the game's narrative actually covers the events of 2006's *Casino Royale* as well as the *Quantum Of Solace* film, melding both stories into a decent shooter that ran on the *Call Of Duty 4* engine. Sadly, senseless enemy AI and short length come to mar the excellent presentation of the game. Nevertheless, it was a promising start by Bond's newest publisher.

GoldenEye 007

■ **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
■ **DEVELOPER:** EUROCOM
■ **FORMAT:** WII

Activision currently has two new *Bond* titles in the works. The first is a rewrite of *GoldenEye 007* for Nintendo's Wii console, which will switch out Brosnan for Daniel Craig, add new stages, reintroduce old ones, feature brutal melee combat, and include eight-player online multiplayer, improved animation and revamped sound, bringing the 13-year-old game up to date with more modern first-person shooters. While there are some who will argue that remaking this classic N64 shooter is a bit of a pointless – and thankless – task, when you consider that all the previous *Bond* games in which Eurocom has been involved have been solid games – including the N64's *The World Is Not Enough*, which is arguably the closest that any developer has come to recapturing the magic of *GoldenEye 007* – we can't help but feel very optimistic about the prospect of seeing the developer tackling this revered and much-loved classic.



The Sound Is Not Enough

While the early 8-bit *Bond* games were generally a bit rubbish, there was one area where nearly all impressed: the music. A number of famed game musicians were brought in to write the music to the games, and the results were generally always impressive. David Whittaker (*Shadow Of The Beast*) composed some wonderful noises for *The Living Daylights* and *Licence To Kill*, programmer/musician Anthony Crowther (*Blagger*) produced a faithful rendition of Duran Duran's *A View To A Kill* in the C64 version of the game, Elite Systems noise stalwart Mark Cooksey (*Ghosts 'N Goblins*) wrote the music for *Live And Let Die*, and Sega music legend Matt Furniss (*Mortal Kombat*, *Road Rash*) laid down some impressive tunes for *The Spy Who Loved Me* and *James Bond: The Duel*. All would do a great job in capturing the classic scores that helped to make the movies so memorable. It's just a shame that the games didn't follow a similar beat.



James Bond 007: Blood Stone

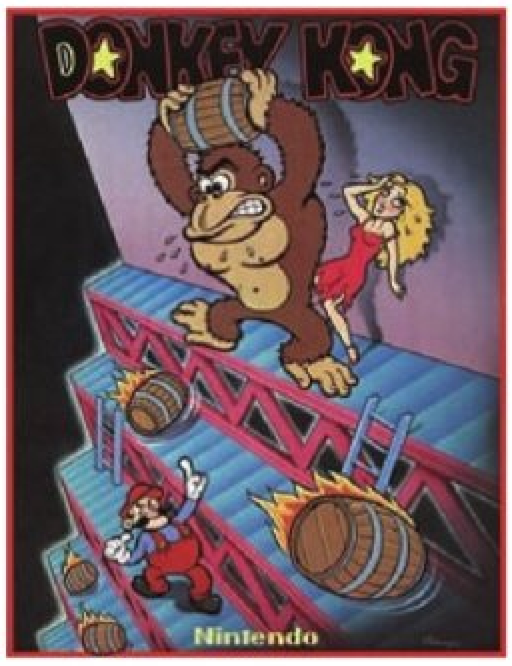
■ **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
■ **DEVELOPER:** BIZARRE CREATIONS
■ **FORMAT:** 360, PS3, PC

Announced this past July and being developed by Bizarre Creations, *Blood Stone* is, at its core, a multifaceted third-person shooter, which, from what we've seen so far, seems to be taking its cues from the *Uncharted* series as well as returning driving sections to the fore. Given Bizarre's past experience in both the online third-person shooter genre (*The Club*) and racing (*Blur*, *Project Gotham Racing*), *Blood Stone* seems a perfect fit for the acclaimed developer. And with no new *Bond* movie on the way, owing to *Bond 23* being put on "indefinite suspension" due to the uncertainty over MGM's future, many *Bond* fans are looking to *Blood Stone* as the next main instalment in the franchise. This is a telling observation of how esteemed and popular the *Bond* videogames have become over the years.



IN THE KNOW

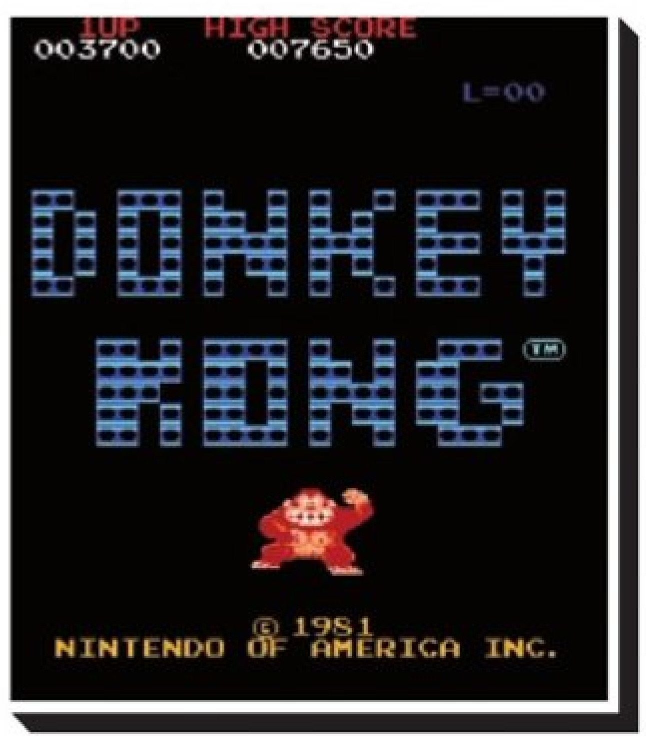
» **Name:** Donkey Kong
» **Released:** 1981
» **Publisher:** Nintendo
» **Developer:** In-house
» **Price:** £100-500
» **By The Same Developer:** *Mario Bros*



COIN-OP CAPERS

#8 Donkey Kong

Martyn Carroll takes a definitive look back at an arcade classic and unravels its brilliance through those who know it best



When it comes to iconic videogames, *Donkey Kong* is the daddy. Created by gaming legend Shigeru Miyamoto and released to huge success in 1981, it's one of the most celebrated and treasured games in history. It single-handedly defined the platform genre and introduced us to not one but two of the most popular videogame characters ever – the titular gorilla and his tormentor Mario. Such is its impact that some enduring videogame myths have built up around its creation. Was the game supposed to be called '*Monkey Kong*' but the name got misinterpreted somewhere along the way? Probably not. Was the game originally designed as a vehicle for Popeye and Brutus? Apparently so. Was the game responsible for saving an ailing Nintendo of America from certain bankruptcy, and providing the Japanese parent with the funding and impetus to develop the Famicom and therefore change the course of gaming forever? Quite possibly.

The facts are that in July 1981 Nintendo produced *Donkey Kong* as an upgrade kit for *Radar Scope*, its *Galaxian*-inspired game released the previous year that, despite initial success, had largely flopped in the US. The majority of US-based *Radar Scope* machines were converted, clearly indicating that the space shooter hadn't been pulling in as many quarters as hoped. The new game certainly did the trick, as Nintendo quickly went from manufacturing conversion kits to building dedicated cabs to meet the massive demand. This led to two cosmetic 'flavours' of *Donkey Kong*: the new, widely produced blue-coloured cabs with added side art, and the rarer converted *Radar Scope* cabs that retained their original red paintwork.

A year on from its initial release, *Donkey Kong* had reportedly earned Nintendo $180 million. This success led to a clamour of console and computer manufacturers looking to license the coin-op. Once more, the whole episode is now swamped in folklore, with deals done that supposedly led to lots of hand-wringing and toy-throwing. It's even commonly suggested that *Donkey Kong* played a part in scuppering negotiations that would see Atari release the Famicom in the US. All that aside, the deals resulted in Coleco receiving the home console rights and Atari settling for the home computer rights.



Coleco immediately played an ace by bundling the game with its ColecoVision console, causing hardware sales to skyrocket. It also put the game out on the Intellivision and Atari 2600 consoles. Such was the popularity of the game that even the scaled-down 2600 version shifted more than 4 million units, generating a massive $100 million in sales. Atari itself released the game on its 400/800 computers and ported it to several others, including the VIC-20, C64, TI-99/4A and Apple II. Inevitably, unlicensed clones with cheeky titles like *Donkey King* and *Killer Gorilla* flooded many computer platforms in the early Eighties. Nintendo, meanwhile, capitalised on the success of the original with a couple of arcade sequels and a range of Game & Watch handheld titles. Mario would, of course, go on to dominate Nintendo's character roster for the next decade, but our anthropoidal friend swung back into contention in the mid-Nineties with the release of a new *Donkey Kong* title on the Game Boy, and the first of Rare's *Donkey Kong Country* games for the SNES.

The original game may be approaching its 30th anniversary, but it's far from forgotten. In recent years it has been thrust back into the public consciousness thanks to the high-profile battles over the *Donkey Kong* high score world record. Die-hard players Billy Mitchell and Steve Wiebe have been involved in a long-running battle to claim the world record, with their efforts to one-up each other's achievements memorably chronicled in the 2007 documentary *The King Of Kong*. Earlier this year, a new competitor named Hank Chien entered the fray, so now it's a three-way fight for the most coveted title in competitive videogaming. In September 2010, Steve Wiebe reclaimed the title with a colossal score of 1,064,500 – but it will have probably changed hands again by the time you read this!

COIN-OP CAPERS

the expert



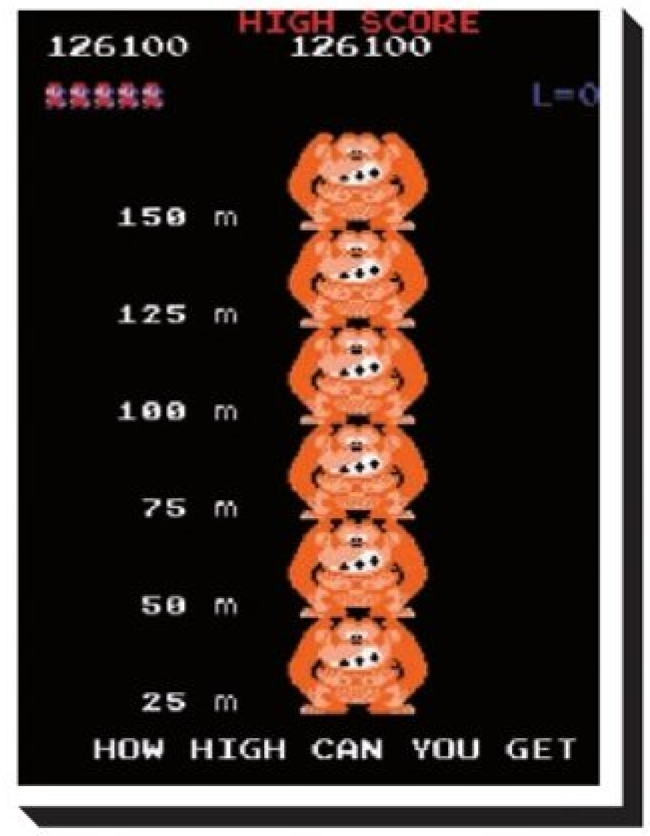
The battle to be 'King of Kong' was famously fought between Billy Mitchell and Steve Wiebe. That all changed in February 2010 when newcomer Hank Chien came from nowhere to take the title

PROFILE

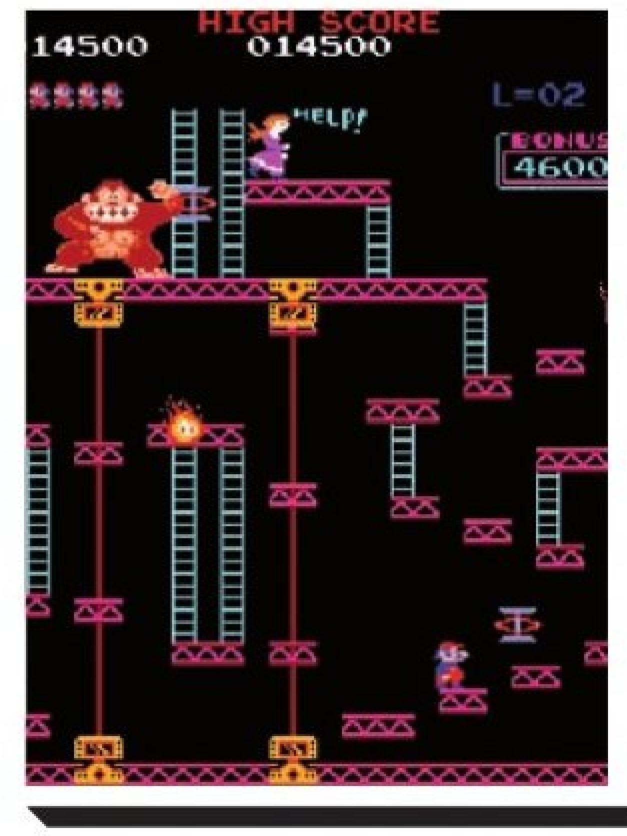
- » **Name:** Hank Chien
- » **Age:** 36
- » **Date of birth:** 4 August 1974
- » **Hometown:** New York, USA
- » **Occupation:** Plastic surgeon

■ Is it true that you only started playing *Donkey Kong* after seeing the *King Of Kong* documentary?

I think I may have played one game of *Donkey Kong* prior to watching *The King Of Kong*, but yes, it's pretty much true I had never played the game. After watching the documentary, I decided to play just for fun. I had no idea where I could find a *Donkey Kong* machine, but I was aware of MAME. I improved very rapidly on MAME and after three months I reached the kill screen. At that point, I decided to find a public machine and thanks to the internet I found one pretty quickly at Barcade in Brooklyn. I then searched eBay and Craigslist for my own machine and after a few months I was able to find one in reasonable shape for a reasonable price.



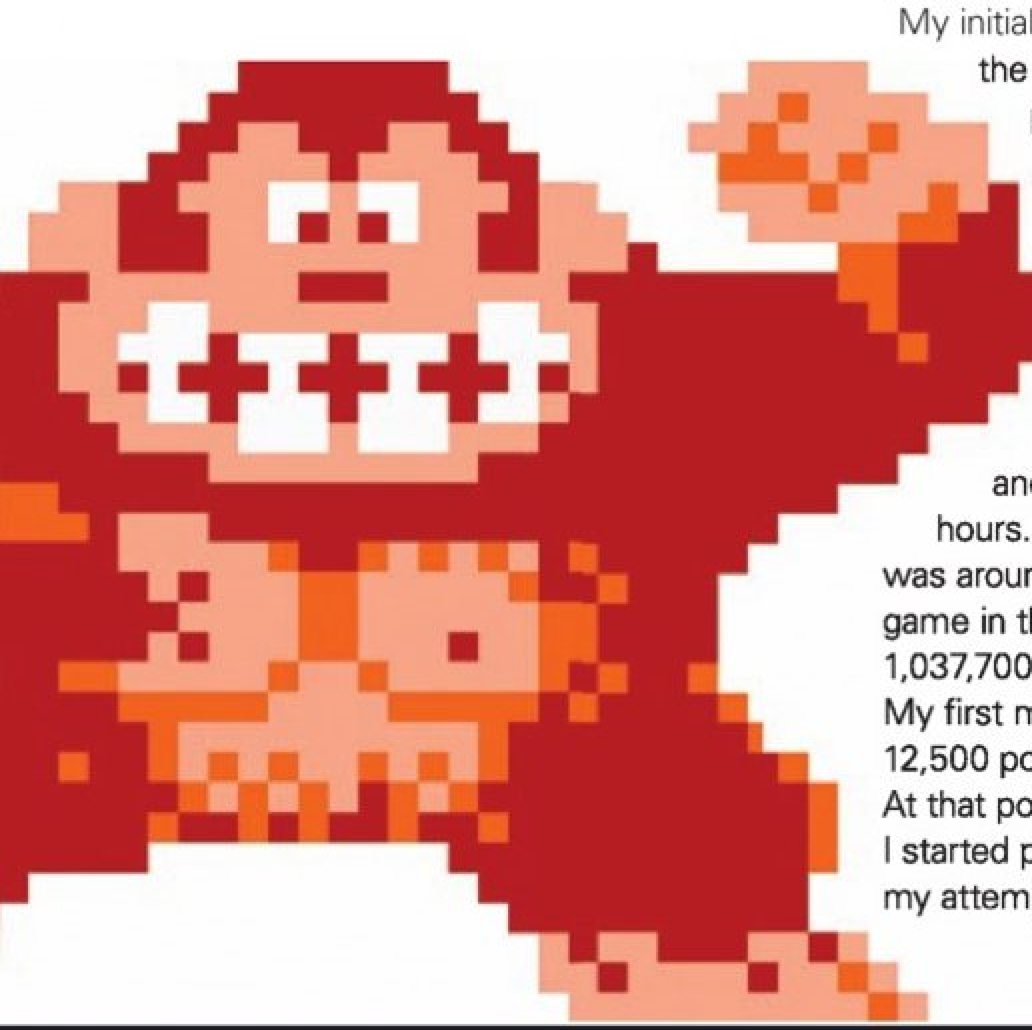
» [Arcade] Upon passing the fifth level, the game loops until level 22, where a bug prevents further play.



» [Arcade] Is it better to take the low or high route? Expert players always opt for the latter.

■ At what point did you realise that you had a chance at the crown?

My initial intention was not to break the world record. I really was just playing for fun. In fact, I was going to try to break a million and then sell my machine. I wasn't even sure I could even break a million until I actually did it. It was 13 September 2009 and I had a business trip that day and had a flight to catch in two hours. My high score at the time was around 940,000. I started to play a game in those two hours and I scored 1,037,700 and barely caught my flight. My first million point game was only 12,500 points shy of the world record. At that point I realised I had a shot and I started playing seriously and recording my attempts.



■ Can you describe the events that led to you scoring 1,061,700 points on 26 February 2010?

After my first million point game, I actually did not play much because I was discouraged by the Twin Galaxies rules for scores over a million. Basically at that time it had to be done live in front of a referee. The rule was changed in November 2009, but with the holidays and work, *Donkey Kong* took a back seat. However, in early February I put my mind to it. In the coming weeks, I had several very close games, so I knew I could do it. Then came 26 February, a Friday. Ordinarily I would have been at work, but a huge snowstorm covered the city and my car was buried in snow so I was stuck at home with nothing to do but play *Donkey Kong*. In the evening I had a really good start and didn't die until late in the game. The rest is history.

■ Your achievement generated lots of press once Twin Galaxies verified it. It must have been a pretty crazy few weeks for you…

After I broke the world record it was really crazy. People were calling my office, my home, my parents' home, email, Facebook, you name it. I was flooded, and that's on top of my ordinary busy life. It was fun to get all that attention, but only for about a day!

■ Did Billy Mitchell or Steve Wiebe offer their congratulations?

Billy Mitchell acknowledged my achievement, but I have not spoken to him directly. I would like to meet him at some point. Steve Wiebe called and emailed to congratulate me personally.

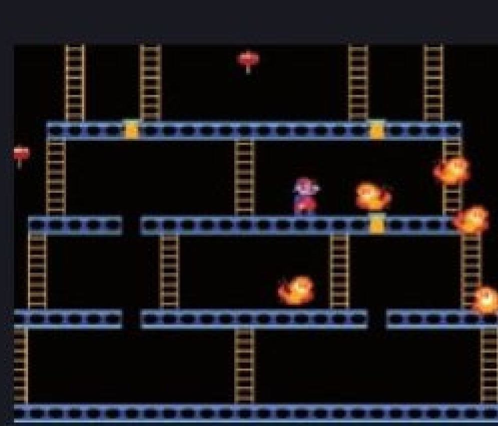
■ Billy reclaimed the high score in July this year, then Steve grabbed

Platforming Perils

Things to look out for when attempting to topple the silly gorilla

Bloomin' Barrels
Jump them, smash them or simply avoid them. Just don't get flattened by them.





Flamin' Flames
The flames are a pain and they feature on most screens. Avoid them wherever possible.

Loopy Lifts
Be careful jumping to and from the lifts, and be sure not to get yourself caught up in the gears at the bottom.





Jumping Jacks
You need to position yourself carefully to dodge these fast-moving hazards. Tricky in later levels.

Pesky Pies
Don't end up with pie on your face. Time your jumps and beware of the conveyor changing direction.





» Hank pictured here practising on his very own *Donkey Kong* cab in his Manhattan apartment.

it once again in September. It looks like neither of these guys plan to give it up any time soon. Are you planning to try to take it back?
Steve is a great player and he has been working hard to reclaim the world record, so he deserves the top spot. Congratulations to him! I do plan on taking it back, but my main goal is to maximise the game to the best of my ability, whether it is a world record or not. In my original world record game, I held back a lot and made some careless mistakes, so I know I can do a lot better. To score high you have to take a lot of risks and be really aggressive.

■ **What kind of high score do you think is possible, with a perfect run?**
The current world record is nowhere near the maximum. The thing about *Donkey Kong* is that there are so many variables and so many ways to play the game, it's hard to say exactly what the maximum score is. I think that the achievable maximum score is close to 1.2 million, but it would require a lot of skill and luck to pull it off. The theoretical maximum is a lot higher – maybe 1.5 million. A great thing about the game is that the world record will always be beatable. This saga isn't over yet.

■ **There's been talk of *The King Of Kong* becoming a dramatised movie. If this happened and you were featured in the film, who would you like to play you?**
I don't think there are any Hollywood actors good looking enough to play me, but if I had to choose, maybe Brad Pitt or Johnny Depp could do it! *

HANK'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Expert strategies from the newest challenger to the Donkey Kong world record

1 ■ **TOP TIP**
For beginners, just clear the boards as fast as you can. On the barrel board always keep an eye on the barrels above you and prepare for the worst case scenario. There really aren't many secrets; it's just a matter of practice.

2 ■ **BONUS PLAY**
When playing for a high score, it's a combination of knowing when to hang around and accumulate points and when to finish the stage to claim the bonus. It is not always beneficial to stay around on a board as the bonus timer ticks down very fast, particularly in the later levels. You have to know when you can 'beat the clock' and when you just have to call it quits.

3 ■ **HAMMER TIME**
Whether to grab the hammer or not is a complicated question. On the barrel board the top hammer is safe, but the bottom hammer is dangerous. I grab it when I'm playing for points but when I'm playing for survival I'll usually skip it. On the conveyers and rivets, that's even more complicated. I could probably write a short book on it.

4 ■ **RIVET ROUTE**
There are two patterns on the rivets that are commonly used, yet there is no consensus even among the top players as to which is better for survival or for points. In one pattern you clear all the rivets on the left and then try to grab the top hammer. In the other, you clear all of the rivets except the one on the level with the bottom hammer, then grab the bottom hammer and run across. Even those two patterns are not foolproof and you have to know what to do when it falls apart.

the sequels

There are dozens of Donkey Kong spin-offs, but only three true sequels



Donkey Kong Jr
Released: 1982

The success of *Donkey Kong* meant that the sequel arrived faster than a tossed barrel on a greased girder. But what's this? There's not a single barrel to be seen. Donkey Kong has been caged by Mario and the moustachioed one has unleashed all manner of jungle critters in an attempt to stop DK's plucky son from rescuing his dad. *Donkey Kong Jr* is a platform game, but a lot of time is spent traversing vines and chains, which can be cumbersome. It doesn't help, either, that Junior is rubbish at jumping, and the result is a slightly awkward sequel that, while utterly charming, lacks the smoothness and grace of the original.



Donkey Kong 3
Released: 1983

DK Jr played a little on the sluggish side, but you certainly couldn't level that at this fast-paced shooter that's far removed from the platforming roots of the series. The title character is once again the cranky nemesis, but Mario by now had better things to do, leaving goofy urchin Stanley to step in and deal with DK. The frantic action takes place over three stages set in a greenhouse, and in each one Stanley must continually blast the pesky primate with his insect spray gun, forcing him up into the rafters where stinging bees ultimately await him. It works brilliantly as an arcade game, in that you offer up a credit and get your five minutes of fun, but the game lacks variety and doesn't warrant repeated plays, thereby denying it the lasting appeal of its forebears.



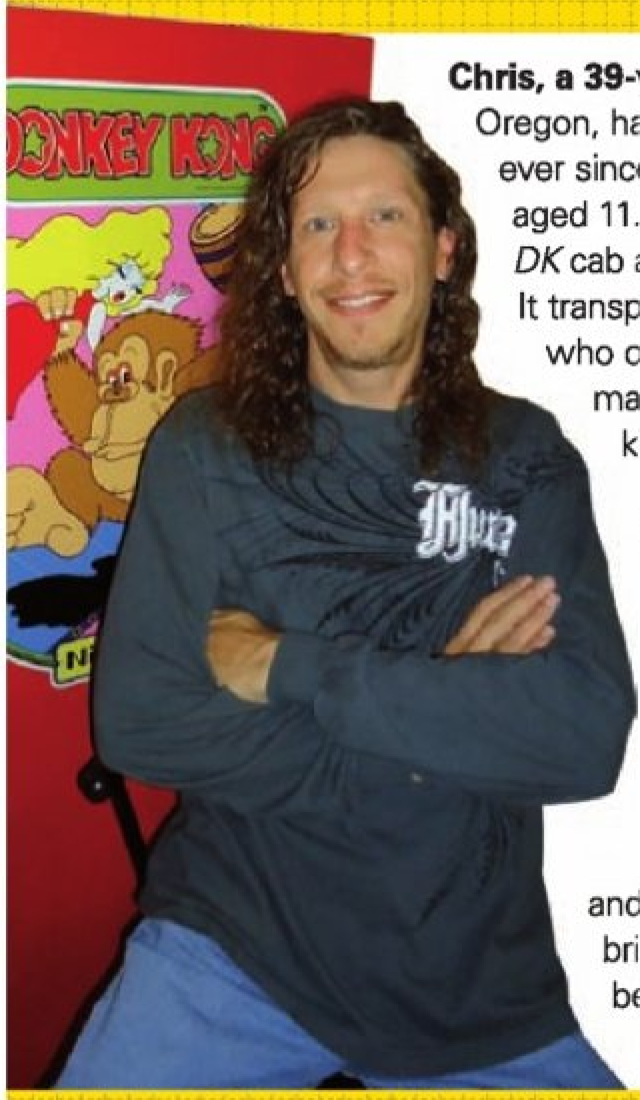
Donkey Kong (GB)
Released: 1994

When it comes to resurrecting and reinventing a franchise, nobody does it better than Nintendo. This game, launched alongside the Super Game Boy in 1994, is a perfect example. It begins as a nifty homage to the original coin-op, with the arcade's four screens authentically reproduced with a few little extras thrown in, but instead of the game looping back to the beginning once DK hits the deck, it instead presents the player with a squillion extra screens to negotiate. In the majority of these, Mario must find an oversized key and carefully carry it to the locked door, which leads to the next level. Part-puzzler, part-platformer, this is an excellent update that deservedly spawned its own spin-off series in the *Mario vs Donkey Kong* games on the GBA and DS.

COIN-OP CAPERS

the machine

Donkey Kong fan Chris Ellison shows off his rare red-coloured machine, which he has painstakingly restored to mint condition



Chris, a 39-year-old IT support worker from Gresham, Oregon, had hankered after his own *Donkey Kong* cab ever since first playing the game in his local bar and grill aged 11. He ran an ad on Craigslist looking for a red *DK* cab and a lady not too far away answered his call. It transpired that she'd acquired it from a local vendor who originally purchased it new as a *Radar Scope* machine. Unfortunately, the years had not been kind to this classic cab.

"It was one step away from a landfill," Chris tells us. "The bezel was so scratched I could barely make out the monitor. The coin door was rusted and the coin mechs were jammed up. To make matters worse, someone had attempted to cut a hole in one of the sides. I wanted a red *DK* really badly but man, this thing was a mess."

Undeterred, Chris transported the cab home and began the process of bringing it back to its brilliant best. "*Donkey Kong* was and always will be a passion for me," he says, "and it's just as much fun now as it was back then."



CABINET

To restore my *Donkey Kong*, I began by lightly sanding down the entire cabinet to give the primer something to adhere to. All of the imperfections including the busted edge and the place where someone had attempted to cut a hole were reconstructed with Bondo putty and sanded flat. The primer was shot with a spray gun. I couldn't get the oil paint to shoot correctly so it was applied using a foam roller. The paint colour was matched by removing a red chip from underneath the coin door where it hadn't seen daylight since 1981.

MONITOR

The monitor is the original Sanyo 20EZ that has been recapped – this is where all the capacitors on the monitor PCB are replaced. It is currently using the original flyback.

BOARD



The original board had developed bad RAM somewhere. Since I don't have the expertise to do this kind of a board repair, I sent it to Dick Millikan of Auburn, Washington, who is known for board repairs. Dick sent me a working board. Being a huge *Donkey Kong* fan, it was mandatory that the Brasington kit was installed. This is an add-on kit that enables the game to save high scores. It's also necessary if you want to install the *D2K: Jumpman Returns* hack. *D2K* is amazing!



CONTROL PANEL

The control panel has been replaced with a reproduction. Interestingly enough, the original panel was using the *Radar Scope* red button for jump, which I chose to re-use. The P1 and P2 buttons are the original Nintendo dark blue. The new instruction cards are also reproduction, as well as the dust cover.



ARTWORK



The control panel itself is in good shape. It is not dented, warped, or Swiss-cheesed. The control panel overlay is in decent condition, though it has a hole worn in it at the front. I have a new overlay for it that I found on eBay about a year ago. I will install it when I restore the machine cosmetically. Regarding the joysticks, which are Seimitsu/SNK LS-30s, one of them was new when I got the machine, while the other has moderate wear.

COIN MECH



The coin mechanisms are original. I decided to paint the coin door and leave the coin entry wear marks for authenticity's sake.

developer Q&A

We speak to industry veteran Garry Kitchen to find out how he managed to squeeze Donkey Kong onto the Atari 2600



How did you get into game development?
In the mid-Seventies, while in college studying electrical engineering, I was hired by a small engineering consulting company. Among other projects, I developed and patented a handheld billiards game called *Bank Shot*, based on a 4-bit microprocessor and an array of 72 LEDs. When the Atari 2600 came out the handheld games started to suffer at the expense of the newest, greatest thing – videogames. In response, I bought an Atari machine, opened it up and reverse-engineered it so that we could compete in that space. I've been developing games ever since.

How did you land the job of converting *Donkey Kong* to the Atari 2600?
At the time, around 1981/1982, there weren't a whole lot of independent videogame developers who knew how to program the Atari 2600. I had the knowledge as I had reverse-engineered the platform the previous year. My brother Steve owned an engineering company and he had a relationship with an executive at Coleco – I believe his name was Eric Bromley. Steve got the *Donkey Kong* contract with Coleco and subcontracted the project to me. It's all about relationships.

Did you get any assistance from Nintendo?
No, nothing. My only source was the actual arcade game. I had direct access to a machine, which Coleco provided, but I didn't get to keep it!

What would you say was the most challenging aspect when working on *Donkey Kong*?
I wanted the 2600 version to look just like the arcade game, but there was a technical problem. The Atari hardware did not have enough memory to display a full bitmap background – the background memory only held enough bits to cover half the screen, so the video display driver would display either a repeating pattern or a reflecting pattern. With this limitation you could not display the slanted ramps that were such an important aspect of the look of the game. This frustrated me until I came up with a technical solution to overcome the limitation, allowing for slanted ramps. It required a rewrite of much of the code but I think it was worth it.

How long did you work on the game, and were you up against a deadline?
It was a three to four month schedule, which was about half the time that should have been allotted. The deadline was immovable, with the ROM cartridge needing to go into manufacturing in time for a holiday shipment. I worked without sleep for the final 72 hours to deliver it on time. It took me a month to physically recover from the ordeal.

The game is often criticised for only featuring two of the original's four screens. Given more time, do you think you'd have been able to squeeze in those extra screens?
There were two factors that prevented me from including the other two screens. The cartridge was 4KB in size, and the beta version of the game, after three months of labour and two screens complete, came in at around 6KB. I was over by 2KB. Bigger cartridges were available, but Coleco made the financial decision not to go for an 8KB cartridge, despite my recommendation and pleading. So, rather than having an extra 2KB to play with and add more screens, I had to spend the last month crunching out 2KB just to make the two screens fit in a 4KB cartridge. The second factor was the schedule. There was no time left. The other screens would have been impossible on the allowed schedule.



The game was a huge seller, with sales of more than 4 million units. Were you lucky enough to get a slice of the profits?
I got a very, very tiny slice. Enough to make it worthwhile, but I certainly didn't get rich off it.

Looking back, how do you reflect on the game?
Not to pat myself on the back, but I still love the game. I thought it turned out pretty well. From my perspective I focused on the quality of the game experience that was in the cartridge rather than lamenting the fact that the other levels were missing. I really wanted to get the iconic first level, with Mario jumping over barrels, to feel as close to the arcade game as possible, and I'm comfortable with how that turned out.

These days you're involved in iPhone development at AppStar Games. What's your take on the Apple devices' importance?
The importance of the iPhone cannot be overstated. The single most important thing it has done is change the buying habits of the videogame consumer. Two years ago my eight-year-old son would ask me for a $30 cartridge for his Nintendo DS. Today he asks me if it's okay to download a $0.99 iPhone game, and he's equally satisfied with the experience. Apple has taught the consumer that good games can be had for under $2 and the games industry will never be the same. The genie is out of the box and the industry will never get it back in.

COIN-OP CAPERS
the conversions



Naturally, one of the most popular arcade games of all time has more than its fair share of home conversions. Here is the lowdown…

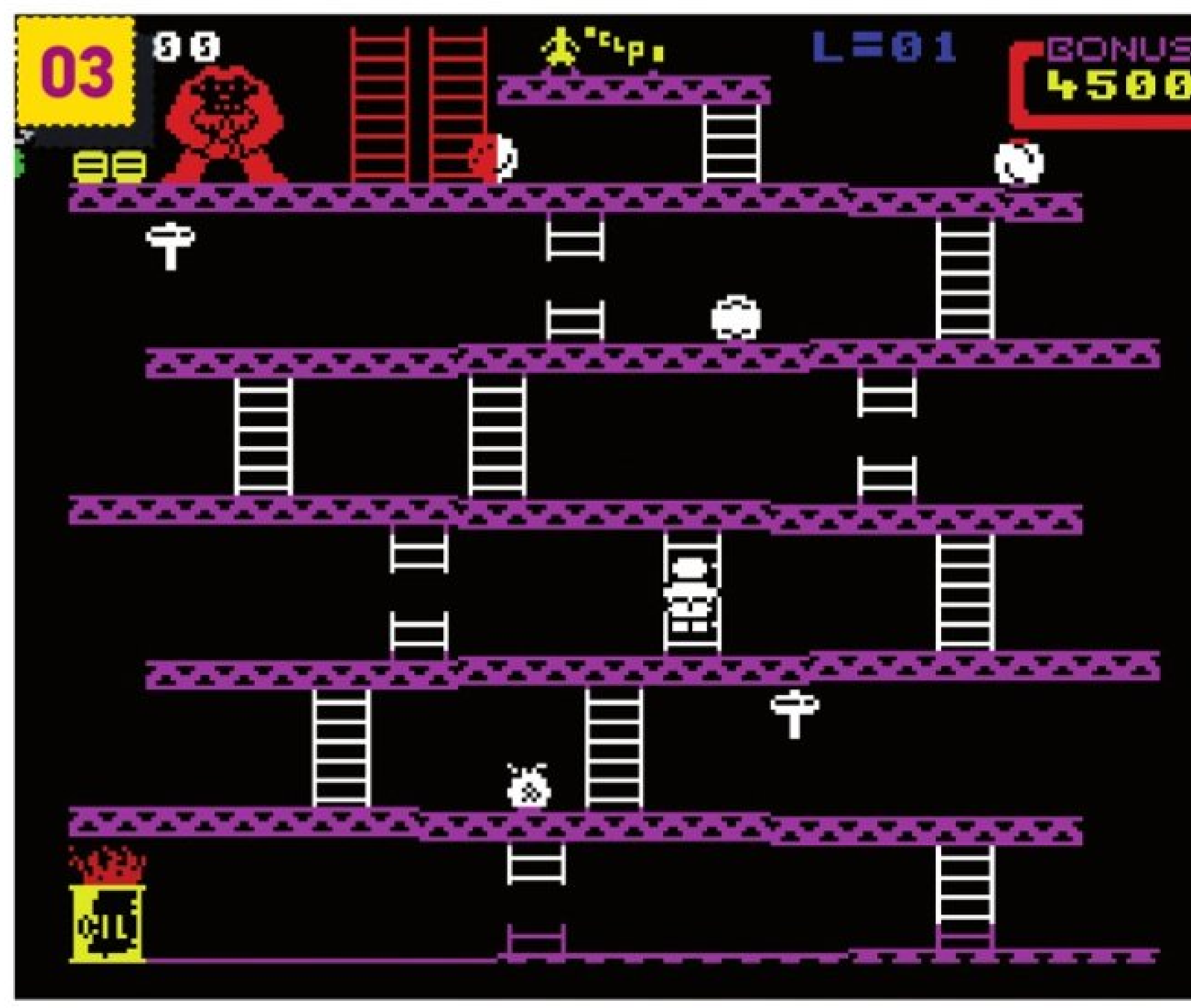
02



01



03



01. CPC (Best Conversion)
That Stuart Campbell awarded it the prestigious accolade of best 8-bit arcade conversion of all time back in issue 76 should be a big indicator of how good this version plays. Featuring big, bright colourful visuals, faithful gameplay, and all four stages, it's a nigh-on perfect conversion for Lord Sugar's unfairly mocked wonder machine, which is why we're awarding it best conversion.

02. Atari 2600
This is a poor conversion, even by Atari 2600 standards. It's missing two stages (Cement Factory and Spring), DK looks like a deranged gingerbread man, the barrels look like cookies, and the behaviour of the enemy flame sprites – they simply yo-yo from one end of the screen to the other – is easy to circumvent. The controls aren't great either.

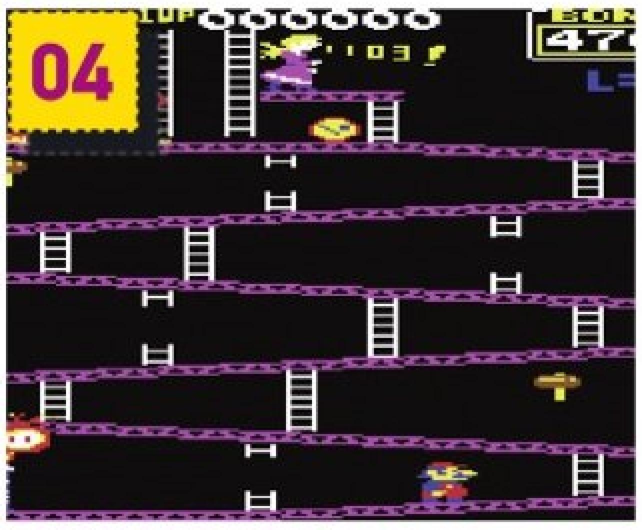
03. Spectrum
Poor graphics aside, the intensity at which Kong lobs his barrels is relentless, and coupled with Mario's weedy jump is a perfect recipe for irritation. In this version it also takes Mario an unnecessarily long time to climb ladders – although this might have something to do with the giant arse that Sentient Software has retrofitted him with, only visible when he's climbing ladders.

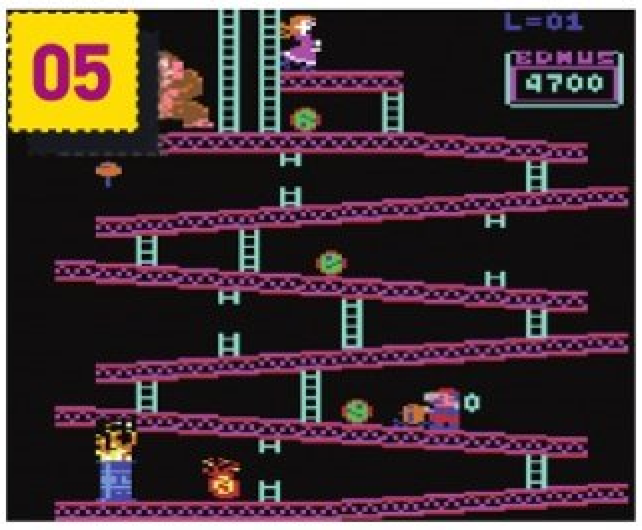
04. C64 (Atarisoft)
This superb version by Douglas D Dragin is another great port. Released in 1983, it's the first official port to include all the stages – impressive considering it was one of the earliest titles for the C64, and subsequent ports on machines boasting far more tech managed just three. With great presentation, and the option to tweak the difficulty of the game, this is generally the more popular of the two C64 versions that saw release.

05. C64 (Arcana)
As well as the great Atarisoft offering, C64 owners received this equally impressive one by Arcana, which also did the CPC version. Featuring all four stages – although this time it's worth noting that they follow the original Japanese level order – great sounds, smooth gameplay and all the cut-scenes, it's another great conversion.

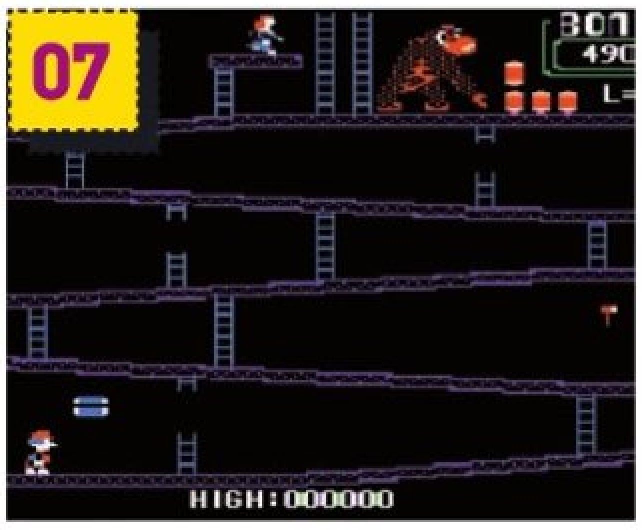
06. NES
As you would expect being on the NES, and from Nintendo, this is a great conversion. The visuals look authentic, and the gameplay and controls are solid. It's missing the Cement Factory stage and the sounds and music differ from the arcade version. This is the most popular of all the home conversions, which is why the cart stayed in production for a staggering five years.

07. Apple II
Despite no Cement Factory, this conversion still offers an authentic game of *DK*, delivering some of the more trivial





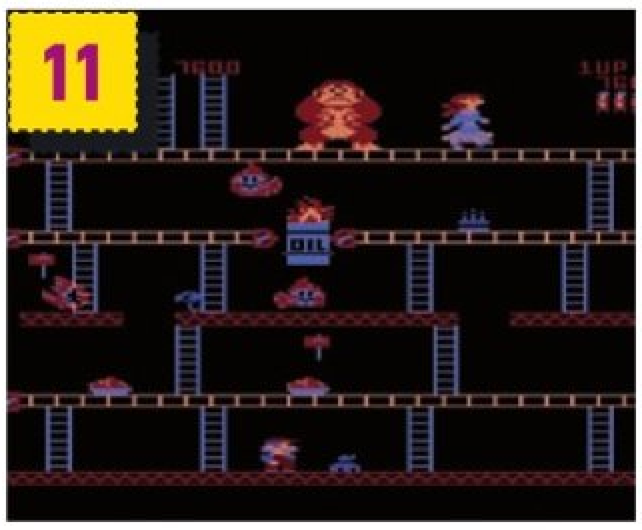


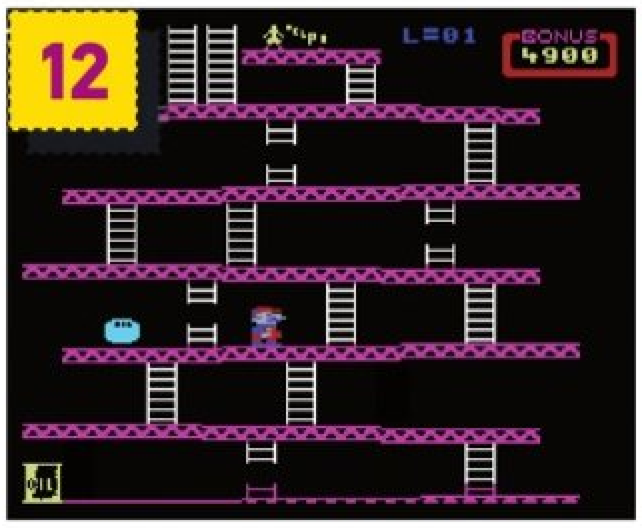














elements of its arcade parent – such as the 'how high can you get' intro screen and the inclusion of Pauline's girly possessions – at the price of good graphics and sounds. It's the nippiest conversion of the game out there, and one of a handful to allow players to tweak the difficulty.

08. ColecoVision

Once again no Cement Factory stage, but nonetheless a decent effort that looks and plays well. Unfortunately its controls let it down, though this has more to do with the inaccurate nature of the console's disc-stick controller than anything else. Coleco also released a version for its Coleco Adam computer. It doesn't look as good as the console port, but it does include all four stages.

09. VIC-20

The graphics are below par, and the game isn't very smooth, but it's not all bad news: the game sounds fantastic, and, amazingly, features all four stages, which is really quite unbelievable. This is as good a job as Atarisoft could be expected to muster up on the modest tech. Taking this into account, this is another decent conversion of *DK*.

10. TI-99/4A

Biggest surprise of the night, though, goes to this fantastic conversion for the TI-99/4A. While the visuals look a little washed out, and the sound effects are painful, the sprites do look nicely detailed and the game is the complete package featuring all four levels from the arcade game in the US order. The gameplay is nice and smooth too. A great conversion.

11. Atari 800

Without doubt the best version to be found on an Atari machine, and was another of a disproportionate number to include all four stages. There are slight differences to the arcade original that only astute *Donkey Kong* fans will pick up on, but most will see this as a good-looking and complete port that certainly puts the dismal 2600 effort to shame.

12. MSX

Unsurprisingly, the MSX conversion, which was also by Sentient Software, suffers from the same issues that plague its similar Spectrum port – namely it doesn't look great and Donkey Kong seems to be working himself into an early grave at the top of the screen. This is probably the worst of all the conversions published by Ocean.

13. Intellivision (Worst Conversion)

Mario looks like Q*bert in dungarees, Donkey Kong like Swamp Thing, and Pauline like an orange dinosaur. It only features two stages and it controls like a dead body. It's rumoured that this version, developed by Coleco, was so bad that, upon seeing it, Mattel thought the company was trying to sabotage its machine. We can believe it.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Radical Software

Most developers move to fresh technology when a computer is all but dead. Not Rob Buckley. He formed Radical Software when other companies were deserting the CPC in droves. David Crookes looks at the result

When you look back at the last years of the Amstrad CPC, it is hard not to feel a pang of regret. It was painful enough to see Amstrad games being swept from the shelves of computer shops to clear room for better-selling titles for more advanced machines. It was doubly choking when the likes of Ocean, Codemasters and US Gold began to walk away.

But the real crushing blow came later when a host of enthusiastic bedroom programmers tried to fill the commercial void that had been left. These coders were pushing the CPC to its limits, and yet by this time so few people were looking. Most of these latter-day efforts became lost almost as soon as they were released, seen only by a hardcore of people who were remaining loyal to Lord Alan Sugar's one-time jewel in the crown.

And yet if American humorist Robert Benchley was right about one thing it was this: "Death ends a life, not a relationship." Those programmers knew the end had come but they were clinging to their love and refusing to let go. Having devoted a sizeable chunk of their youth to Amstrad's marvel, they wanted it to carry on, and it arguably led to the most exciting chapter in the CPC's life. If only more people had been around to witness it…

Those days had brought with them a burgeoning public domain (PD) scene. It was rapidly becoming the main outlet for the latest and best CPC apps and games, and it was a movement that *Amstrad Action* magazine wholeheartedly supported. People would send a disk, a stamped addressed envelope and a nominal sum – usually 50p or £1 – to a public domain library. In return, they would receive their disk bulging with (mostly) amazing goodies.

There were some real pearls, from original titles such as *Croco Magneto* to clones like *Puzznix*. *Amstrad Action* – which eventually became the last newsstand publication for the CPC – tapped into this vibrant 'underground' scene with enthusiasm, carrying news about the active individuals and packing its cover tape with the cream of what it had to offer.

It would also encourage readers to become involved, with many articles detailing how to start fanzines or set up public domain libraries. In part, it was borne out of necessity – there wasn't much else to write about – but this can-do, roll-up-your-sleeves attitude was infectious, and *AA* essentially became a club, the focal point for the fevered activity that was occurring at that time.

It was into this atmosphere that Robert Buckley seized his chance and set up Radical Software. He had already produced programs for the CPC and he was a well-known figure within the scene, but he wanted to fill the void left by the departure of the commercial companies. His aim was to simply provide a way to sell his own games and make money from them, but in time he began to sell those produced by others too. His company may not have been the biggest the CPC had ever seen, but it was nevertheless an important entry in the history of Amstrad's machines.

INSTANT EXPERT

Radical Software was a one-man developer formed to bridge the gap left when the commercial software houses deserted the Amstrad CPC.

Its owner, Rob Buckley, was no stranger to the CPC scene, having produced the ace adventure game *Eve Of Shadows* a couple of years previously.

Radical's first release was *Ball Bearing*. It was based on the PD game *Croco Magneto*. *Amstrad Action* magazine hated it.

The game hardly sold any copies. Most people at the time were satisfied with getting free public domain games or delving into the free-for-all public domain marketplace for themselves.

Buckley decided to release the Plus-only game *Fluff*. He figured it would satisfy a perceived hunger for games among owners of Amstrad's ill-fated CPC update.

***Amstrad Action* loved** it, but again it failed to really sell. Radical started publishing other people's games instead.

Buckley did have two other self-developed games on the go – *Lethal Moves* and *Abandoned* – but they were cast aside.

When *Amstrad Action* closed with its June 1993 issue, Radical also called it a day. Buckley eventually started making Game Boy Color games instead.



> **"This was the rise of the enthusiast, where companies selling PD software were big names"** ROB BUCKLEY ON THE LAST DAYS OF THE CPC

Back in time

Buckley got his first taste of computers when he was given a ZX81 for his 12th birthday. He acquired his first CPC a couple of years later and began to program, with his first few games on the Amstrad CPC being written entirely in BASIC. "I seem to recall I had four type-ins published in magazines," he says. "The first one was called *Intergalactic Stunt Parrot*, which was in a magazine called *Computer Gamer*, and I earned £50, though I think my mum had to spend £60 in phone calls to them to get the cheque. A few other games followed, published in the same magazine, and combined they were enough to buy me a DD1 disk drive for the Amstrad. A disk drive was the most important thing a coder at that time required."

Shortly after, Buckley began to write an art package, which he called Smart, and a commercial flick-screen adventure called *Johnny Goes To Russia* that was in the mould of *Everyone's A Wally*. He sent it to Mikro-Gen and a few other publishers, but it was returned and rejected. "It was awful," he admits. "My game used a very poor sprite routine that looked dreadful when the character moved over anything."

Putting the game to one side, he produced Smart 2, an art package that allowed the production of graphics in the CPC's lowest resolution, Mode 0. It was intended purely for Buckley's own use – he felt that he would be better able to design or draw if he had written the art program himself – and this led him to produce his first critically acclaimed game, *Eve Of Shadows*.

Creating texty adventures

Buckley was a fan of classic Infocom and Level 9 adventure games, and *Eve Of Shadows* was his attempt to imitate their style. It was a text adventure title with an expansive parser and colourful, still images of various locations and headshots of the people you would meet as you played. The story was standard fare – you play a prince called Tanis whose father, the king, has been captured – but the game's execution was well-received.

The game took Buckley five months to create, part-time, and he confesses that he hardly planned any of it. There was no map before he began coding and the process was organic. "I've tended to be graphics-led in that I'd see something and then draw something similar and then somehow try to include it," he says. "So you may question why there was a part with a dragon sitting on a mound of treasure. Well, I liked the book cover of *The Hobbit*, so my version of it went in the game."

Ironically, however, Buckley says he is a coder first and foremost – "I'm certainly no artist" – and he insists that gameplay was always king. "It just helps if games look pretty to get you into them. But I

BY THE NUMBERS

1 The number of people working at Radical Software – Rob Buckley.

2 *Street Fighter II* was much-anticipated by CPCers. It never came. Radical proposed a similar game: *Lethal Moves*. That never came either.

8 The number of characters that *Lethal Moves* would have had, if it had made it to release.

128 The number of kilobytes of RAM that most Radical games needed. This cut off the CPC464, with its 64k memory limit.

60 The number of colours on a *Fluff* screen at once. It ran at 50 frames per second.

90 The percentage received by *Fluff* in *Amstrad Action*.

10 the number of commercial copies that *Eve Of Shadows* sold before becoming public domain software.

100 the number of copies of *Fluff* sold.

0 the number of Radical games with copy protection. Buckley felt people should be allowed to back up their games.

TIMELINE

- **1991** *EVE OF SHADOWS*, A COMMERCIAL TEXT ADVENTURE GAME, PRODUCED IN BASIC AND USING BUCKLEY'S SMART APP, IS RELEASED.
- **1991** *EVE OF SHADOWS* BECOMES PUBLIC DOMAIN AND INTRODUCES HIM TO THE 'UNDERGROUND' CPC PROGRAMMING SCENE.
- **1992** ROB BUCKLEY IS MADE REDUNDANT FROM AN ARCHITECTURE FIRM.
- **1993** ROB BUCKLEY SETS UP RADICAL SOFTWARE AND STARTS TO WRITE *BALL BEARING*.
- **1993** *BALL BEARING* IS REVIEWED IN *AMSTRAD ACTION*.
- **1994** ROB BUCKLEY ANNOUNCES *FLUFF* AND *LETHAL MOVES*.
- **1994** *FLUFF* IS RELEASED. IT GOES ON TO SELL JUST 100 COPIES.
- **1994** *MASTERS OF SPACE* IS PUBLISHED BY RADICAL.
- **1994** *STAR DRIVER* AMAZES WITH ITS TECHNICAL ABILITY BUT IS A POOR DRIVING GAME.
- **1994** *WHO SAID THAT?* IS RELEASED.
- **1994** ROB BUCKLEY, WHO HAS STARTED WORK ON A *DOOM* CLONE CALLED *ABANDONED*, IS TOLD THAT *AA* MAY NOT LAST LONG. HE CANS *LETHAL MOVES* AND *ABANDONED*.
- **1994** RADICAL PUBLISHES *MEGABLASTERS*, WHICH WAS ORIGINALLY GOING TO BE A PUBLIC DOMAIN GAME.
- **1995** *AMSTRAD ACTION* CLOSES WITH THE FINAL ISSUE, 117, CARRYING A RADICAL AD. RADICAL FOLLOWS SUIT AND SHUTS DOWN, FEELING THE MARKET HAS DIED.

"A new breed of hero? Meet Fluff – is she the CPC's answer to Sonic and Mario?"

AMSTRAD ACTION BIGS UP RADICAL'S NEW CHARACTER

▶ loved adventures – they just had a sense of bigness and had real humour. *Leather Goddesses Of Phobos* was my favourite. Perhaps, like Ultimate, it was just the big boxes that made them stand out. One thing I did know when I sold games: I wasn't going to put them in cassette cases. It was big boxes or nothing."

Eve Of Shadows was produced in BASIC rather than machine code or via adventure creation software such as the popular Graphic Adventure Creator or Professional Adventure Writer. It was also a disk-only game, so if Buckley wanted to put his titles into cassette cases, it certainly wasn't going to be possible with this one.

"I remember thinking that GAC and PAW were limited," he said. "I wanted loads of text and pictures, and I just thought that the better the game was, the more people would want it even if they had to go out and buy a disk drive. I found the simplistic images in games produced via GAC or even those included in Level 9 games to be horrid and clearly just an afterthought. I wanted nice graphics, which is what made the game feel different, so disk was the only option."

Buckley decided to sell the game direct via mail order, placing an advert in *Amstrad Action*'s small ads section. Soon after, he was approached by Debbie Howard who ran a public domain library called Adventure PD. She asked if Buckley would be interested in releasing the game free of charge. "I think it sold about ten copies and, looking back, I wonder why I never offered it to a publisher, but I guess the adventure market was dead," Buckley recalls. "So when Debbie asked me to release it for free, I thought, 'Why not?' That was kind of the slippery slope that dragged me into the CPC scene, which by then was getting rather compact."

Upon its PD release, *Amstrad Action*'s adventure game reviewer, The Balrog (aka Stuart Whyte), gushed: "The graphics are crisp and colourful and match the location descriptions well. The graphics and voluptuous text descriptions mean that the game looks professional – the screen layout is similar to *Lord Of The Rings*." He awarded the game 81%, which, had it been in the main reviews section, would have earned it an *AA* Rave.

"I was shocked when it got attention as a public domain title," says Buckley, who later went on to produce *Undersea Adventure*, a game he describes as his prettiest but never saw the light of day. "By then I was a proficient Z80 coder, and the game wasn't technically good from a coding point, but it stood out from the crowd of GAC and PAW games. From a commercial viewpoint, they were never going to sell, but I loved writing text adventures as you can make it as big or small a technical challenge as you choose. Attempting to understanding the English typed in by the user was fun."

A Radical thought

At the end of 1992, Buckley had been made redundant from his day job. Wondering what to do next, he decided to take the plunge and set up a commercial company and quickly formed Radical Software. It effectively consisted of



GOOD GOSSIP

The CPC scene was filled with characters and lots of very talented people. "Richard Fairhurst wrote an amazing route planner," says Buckley. "But what I remember above all was that it was a fairly tight-knit community, all of whom knew stories and gossip about each other, and I'll admit that time I should have been developing was spent chatting on the phone about other people on the scene. I'm sure that much of the hardware and software to come out of those few years owes more to impressing friends in the community than anything else. Personally, I made some good friends, who unfortunately I no longer keep in contact with."



» [CPC] Just one of the many games to come out of the community.





» [CPC] *Fluff* was feature-packed and full of neat touches such as these moving platforms.



» [PC] The PC conversion of *Ball Bearing* looked pretty slick.

Buckley sitting in a room all day, knocking out code and graphics for games but, before long, the first game, *Ball Bearing*, was ready. It was an enhanced copy of Buckley's favourite public domain game, *Croco Magneto*, and, like the original, it consisted of a ball moving left to right and bouncing, with the player only controlling the vertical movement.

"It was such a simple idea, but I thought *Croco Magneto* hadn't implemented it in the correct way," says Buckley. "*Croco Magneto* was flick-screen, so I set about redoing the concept with scrolling and more graphics."

The game took two months to write, and it was a small game in size, complexity and scope. "Looking back, it's amazing how simple coding for the CPC and in Z80 was," Buckley says. "Most games were little more than a sprite routine and a simple control method, and often only a few kilobytes in size. The rest of the RAM was taken up with graphics and levels. Certainly the graphics and level design took most of the time."

Buckley then went out and, true to his word, he had big boxes made. He bought tapes, disks and paid for expensive colour printing. The game sold for £3.99 on cassette and £5.99 on disk, and it was reviewed in issue 97 of *Amstrad Action*. Perhaps cruelly, the magazine made a point of the prices and added "alternatively, you can find *Croco Magneto* from most PD libraries for about 50p (copying charge)."

Suffice to say, the game reviewed badly, with writer Simon Forrester giving it a paltry 40%. The review text also included a rant against PD software creators, saying it was "based almost solely on unimaginative people ripping off commercial ideas and thinking they're some kind of subversive movement against professional software". It seemed as if *AA* was turning on the very people who were helping to keep the scene alive. But despite *Ball Bearing*'s low overall score, it did get 65% for graphics, 60% for sonics, 80% for grab factor and 60% for staying power. And that encouraged Buckley, who decided to keep going.

Decline of CPC

Around this time, the writing really was on the wall for the CPC in a commercial sense, and yet much positivity remained. In April 1993, *Amstrad Action* ran a three-page article looking at the state of the CPC scene, and it noted that the commercial industry's support was "limited in comparison to […] other formats".

But when you consider that this was being written nine years after the launch of the CPC464, it showed just how resilient the Amstrad had proven to be. More remarkably, *Amstrad Action* was selling 21,832 copies at that time, showing encouraging and astonishing support from readers and users if nothing else.

"*Amstrad Action* seemed to be the only constant," says Buckley. "Commercial games companies were leaving the CPC and the magazine coverage was starting to disappear." The previous year, a new magazine had risen from the ashes of *Amstrad Computer User* called *CPC Attack*. Its six-issue run ended in November 1992. Fanzines existed, however, from *Artificial Intelligence* to *WACCI*. Increasingly, the computer's future was in the hands of a tight-knit fan base.

"In many respects it was a weird time because this was the rise of the enthusiast, where companies selling PD software, or groups doing small hardware projects or selling disk utilities, were big names," Buckley remembers. The CPC landscape was dominated by companies such as Robot PD, which was run by talented programmer Richard Fairhurst, who also wrote for *Amstrad Action*, Dartsma, Campursoft and STS Computers.

Every month, more and more groups sprang up to fill the void left by the lack of commercial software, and the demo scene in particular proved jaw-dropping. One offering, *The Demo*, by a group called Logon System, was packed with hardware effects, and it was common to see different resolutions on the same screen, rasters, borderless screens and much more. A German demo by a coder called Face Hugger included vectorballs.

Most of the demos were admittedly pointless in the respect that they showed off effects but did little else, but Elmar Krieger, a prominent demo programmer, took things further and produced the brilliant and visually amazing *Pang* clone *Zap 'T' Balls*. Advances were being made.

Be scared, Sonic

Buckley wanted to stay out of the PD wars and concentrate on commercial software, but with *Ball Bearing* proving to be a poor seller it wasn't easy. Buckley looked at the state of the CPC market and an idea struck him. He noticed that there had been very few games taking advantage of the enhanced abilities of the Plus machines. ▶

ABANDONED PROJECTS

Not all of Radical's games were released. Two notable titles were shelved: *Lethal Moves* and, ironically, *Abandoned*.

Lethal Moves was a fighting game and was actually a suggestion by one of the *Amstrad Action* staff, who told Buckley that *Street Fighter II* wasn't being released. "They asked me to develop a *Street Fighter* clone and they promised to really push it," he says. "All they got was grief from kids phoning up about *Street Fighter II*, and they reckoned that a fighting game would be a big seller."

Buckley produced the core routine and had one complete fighter working. But *AA*'s editor, Dave Golder, called to say he believed the next issue of the magazine was the last, so Buckley halted the project. In the end, the magazine continued for a few months longer.

Abandoned was based on work Buckley had carried out for a machine code article in *AA* about scaling graphics. "The routine was actually very efficient and I decided to build a game around it," Buckley says. "Effectively it was like *3D Monster Maze*, but was to be set on an abandoned moon base, which had been wiped out by an alien. It was about as close to *Doom* as the CPC would get at the time."

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Rob Buckley

After Radical, Buckley took his Z80 skills and worked on various Game Boy Color projects for a number of different companies. He was the lead programmer for the strategy puzzle-solving game, *Babe And Friends* in 1999, which was published by Crave.

He then moved on to the Game Boy Advance and was the engine programmer for *Star Wars: Flight Of The Falcon* in 2003. It was developed by Pocket Studios and took place around the time of the original *Star Wars* trilogy.

Buckley finally hung up his commercial game-coding shoes about six years ago. Now he spends his time producing websites and coding applications, although he retains his love for videogames and would like to return to them one day.

"I haven't quite given up on games, and I've almost reverted to where I started," he confirms. "I'm working on what remains my favourite game concept: *Ball Bearing*. I'm writing it for the PC but it's still a work in progress, though progress is [slow]."

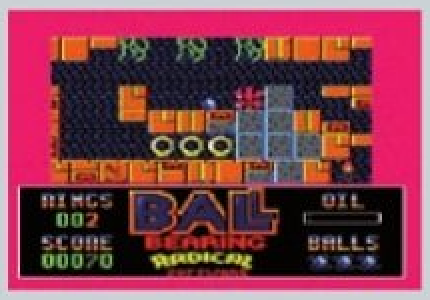
The new *Ball Bearing* is the same game as the original, but in 3D. It lacks around 20 levels to make it a game, however. "It also lacks a few other bits and pieces," says Buckley. "I doubt I'll ever finish it. This size of game is near-impossible for one person to do."

SIX OF THE BEST



Fluff (1995)

Fluff was bizarrely seen as the CPC's answer to *Sonic* or *Mario*, but this beautiful game was released on an ageing 8-bit at the end of its life. That said, *Fluff* is a superb, fun platformer, which made great use of the Plus machines' capabilities.



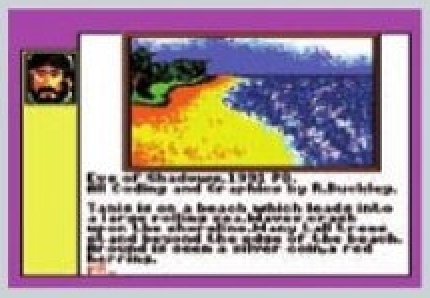
Ball Bearing (1993)

One of the finest games released exclusively for the CPC was the freebie public domain title *Croco Magneto*. *Ball Bearing* took this concept, introduced scrolling, and replaced the blocks with rings, adding power-ups and lives.



Masters Of Space (1994)

Created by programmer Stephen Baker, *Masters Of Space* was published by Radical and was a fine find. It looks and sounds amazing and shows how the CPC was still delivering the goods long after it disappeared from the shops.



Eve Of Shadows (1991)

Although *Eve Of Shadows* is not strictly a Radical release, it was written by Rob Buckley. Created in BASIC and CPC-only, it combined crisp, colourful artwork with logical muscles in a text adventure packed with dragons, trolls and mazes.



Megablasters (1994)

Megablasters takes the genius of *Bomberman* and packages it well for the CPC. The two-disk game developed by Odiesoft revolves around Bart and Bob's attempts to rescue twins whisked away by evil sorcerer Cobron.



Smart Plus (1993)

Rob Buckley liked to have full control of his games to the extent that he even produced the art packages on which he created his graphics. Smart Plus only works on the Plus range, making use of the extra colours of those machines.

TWO TO AVOID

Who Said That?

As a party game, it may prove mildly entertaining. Then again, with so much else to play, you just wouldn't bother. *Who Said That?* is a game of quotes. A phrase is presented to you and you have to select who uttered those words from a list of people. There are around 300 quotes and the games are split into rounds.

The graphics are eye-searingly bad and, strangely for a game like this, there is no multiplayer. Given the fact that many of the CPC's late games were pushing boundaries in one way or another, *Who Said That?* sorely disappoints.



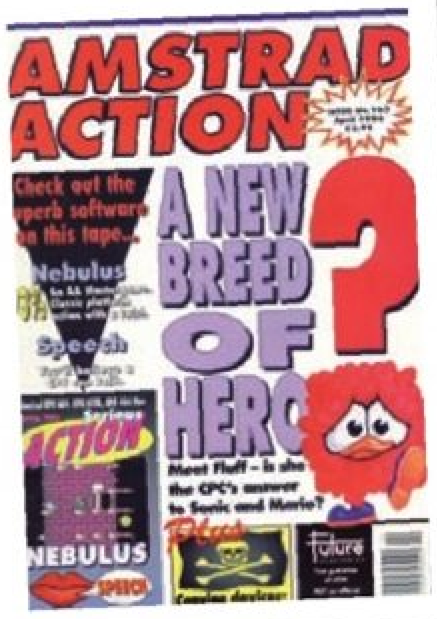


Star Driver

This overhead driving game has players driving over a host of asteroids, and while the perspective enables you to see a good deal of road ahead, the fact that you lose a life whenever you veer off the narrow tracks means this is one difficult game – especially given the time limit.

Technically, though, it's brilliant. Baker managed to pull off scaling that was not unlike the SNES's Mode 7 technique, with pixels growing as you got closer. And yet it appears all of the game's effort went into the presentation, as it's akin to a technical demo.

Amstrad had stopped programmers of disk and tape games from accessing the extra capabilities of the Plus – including the 4,096 colours – which it intended purely for cartridge titles. But a way around the block had been found: Codemasters utilised the extra colours for the cassette release of *Stryker In The Crypts Of Trogan* in 1992, and Eric Zmiro had used it to great effect in *Prehistorik 2* a year later. Buckley wanted to do the same with his new game, *Fluff*.



"Amstrad had locked the ASIC chip, the thing which enabled all the Plus features," explains Buckley. "A French demo group called Logon allegedly reverse-engineered it and broke the locking code. It was just sending a sequence of 14 numbers to the chip, which allowed all the nice hardware goodies to be available. This was two or three years after the Plus and the GX4000 console was released, and by then had flopped, so Amstrad clearly saw no point in chasing people with lawyers."

Buckley surmised that Plus owners would rush to buy a game that made good use of the extra facilities of their machines. First, however, he produced Smart Plus, an art package that could be used to design the graphics for the advanced machines. He sold this utility, which reviewed well. Sales, however, were poor. But Buckley was determined to tap into a market he felt was in desperate need of games.

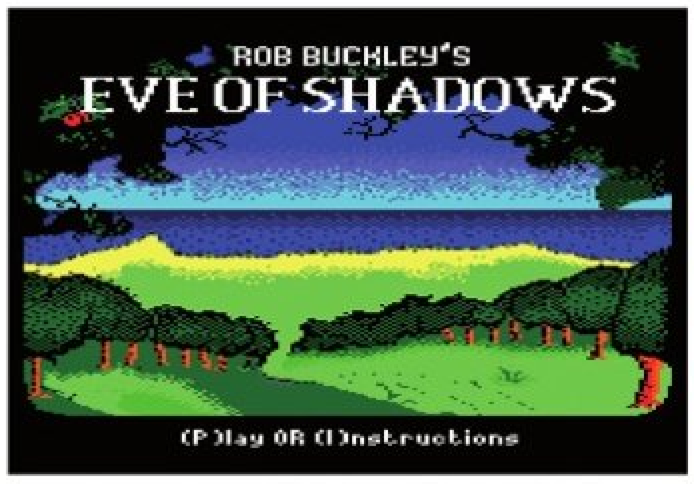
Fluff was an attempt to produce a *Sonic The Hedgehog* game for the CPC. "Looking back I clearly didn't even get close, but I think it was as good a game as I could have written at that time, and I'm still proud of it," says Buckley. "It introduced lots of features that hadn't been seen or used very well in a game on the Amstrads in gameplay control terms, even though the story was somewhat hackneyed."

To Buckley's surprise, *Fluff* made the front cover of *Amstrad Action*. Issue 103 was splashed with the headline, 'A new breed of hero?' carrying the strapline, 'Meet Fluff – is she the CPC's answer to Sonic and Mario?'. Inside was a two-page preview. *AA* had wanted to carry out a full review, but the game wasn't ready on time, a fact that it relayed to its readers.

"I was very pressured at the time because I was trying to develop and run the company that was now taking orders every day," recalls Buckley. "*Amstrad Action* was trying to push *Fluff* big time and create a buzz, which was both a benefit and a problem. One day I got a call from the editor, Dave Golder. He said: 'Hey Rob, we're putting you on the cover and running a two-page article on the game.' 'Sorry what game?' '*Fluff*!' 'But it's not finished. In fact it's not even in a playable state at the moment.' 'Oh. Can you just send it over? We go to press in two days.' The game they previewed was pretty different to the final one and showed graphics, none of which made the final game, but you can't

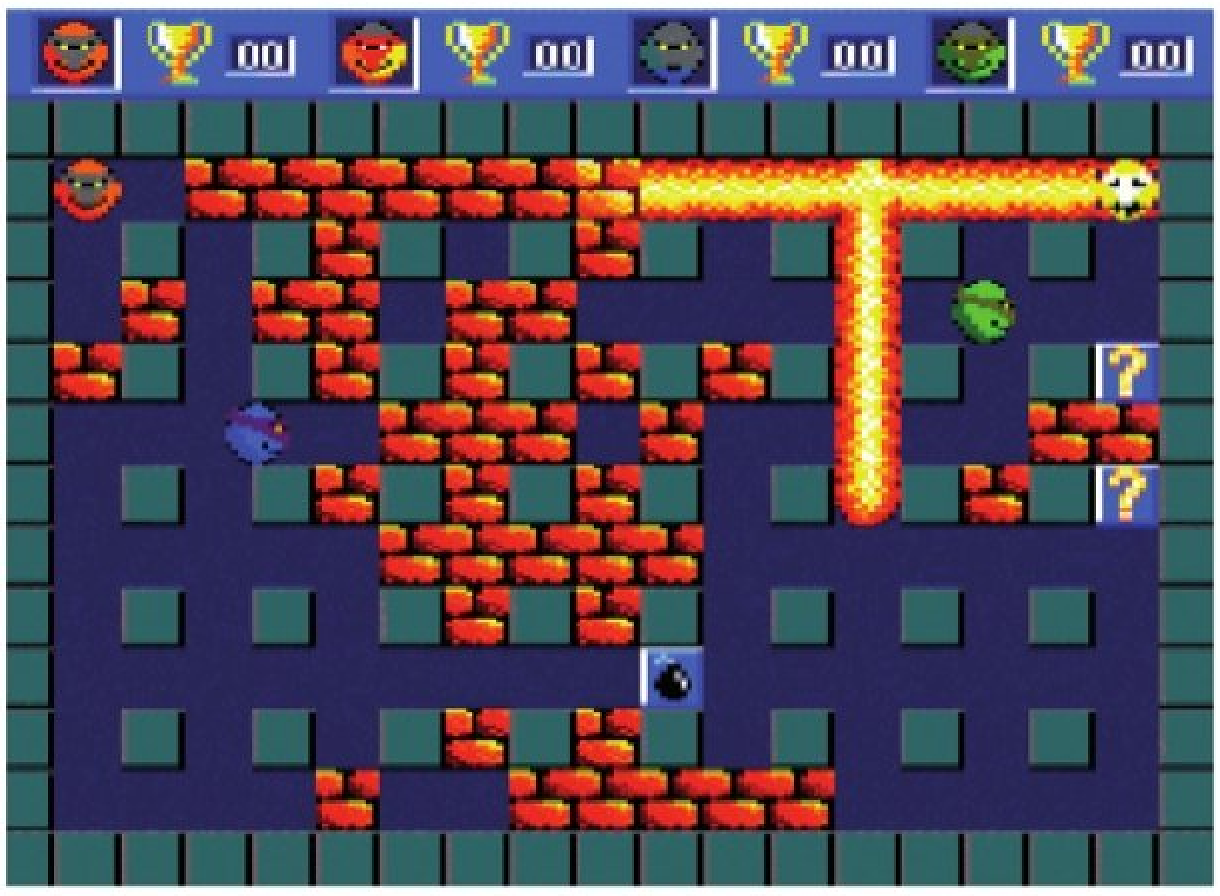


» [CPC] Rob Buckley had his first work published in *Computer Gamer* magazine.

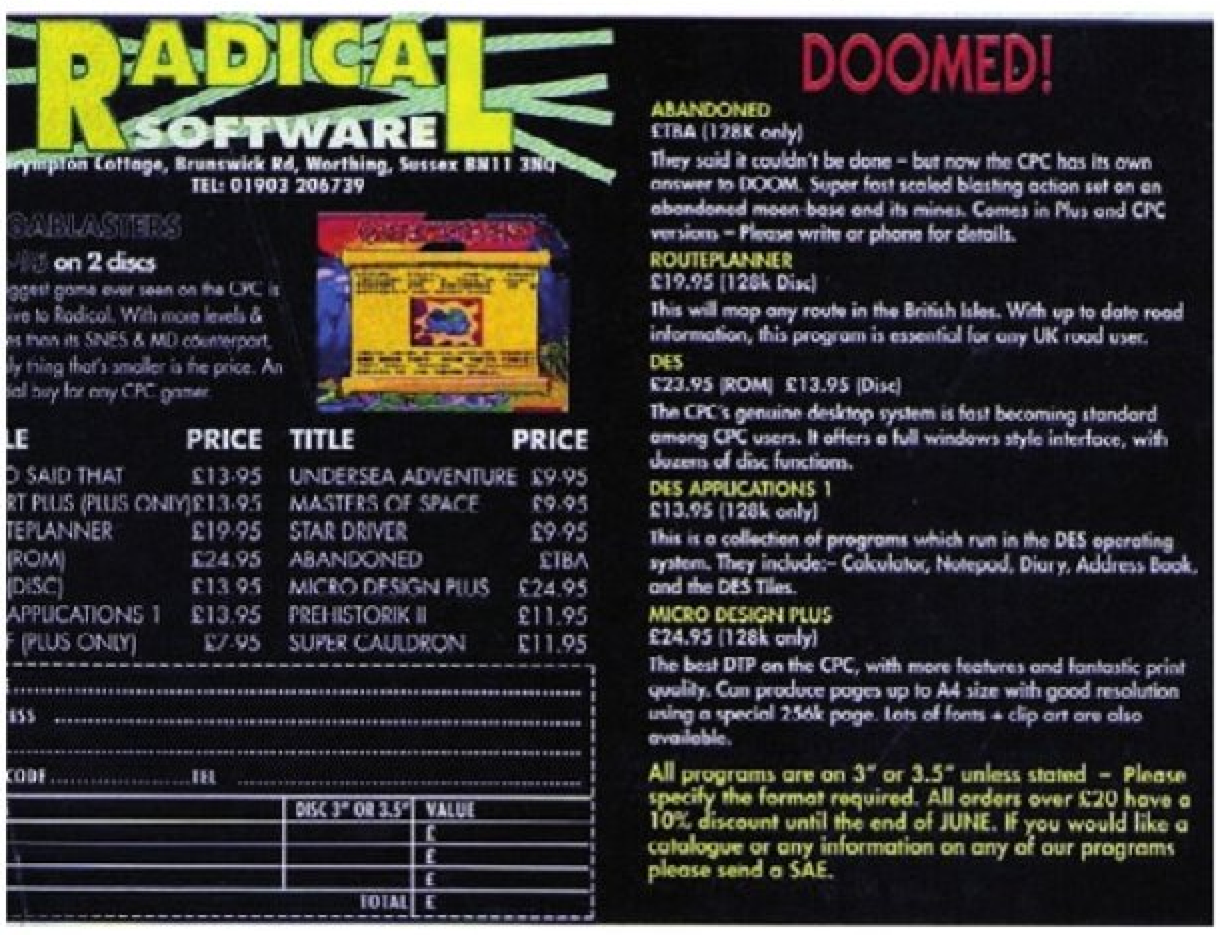


» [CPC] *Rob Buckley's Eve Of Shadows* was a great text adventure game, surprisingly written in BASIC.





» [CPC] As a *Bomberman* clone, *Megablasters* excelled, and it had a four-player mode for lots of fun.



» Radical was advertising in *Amstrad Action* until the very final issue, number 117.

turn down the front page of a newsstand magazine, can you?"

Golder was quite scathing of the character. "I really find the character a turn-off," he wrote. "Why does the CPC need another cutesy platformer?" But in the following issue, Simon Forrester got the final version and he was won over. "It's a shame the game's Plus only," he surmised, "but that's one of the reasons it's so damned good." He said the game was "an impressive piece of coding" and he awarded it 90%. That would have been an *AA* Mastergame, had the magazine been running such an accolade at the time.

The biggest problem, however, was sales. Despite the hype and the good review, the game sold just 100 copies. This was despite Radical Software advertising heavily in *Amstrad Action*, a magazine that Buckley even started to write for but was now down to 15,168 sales. Much of his time was taken up running the company, taking orders and getting constant phone calls from magazines trying to sell advertising space.

RADICAL CHANGE FOR AA?

The CPC scene arguably died when *Amstrad Action* ceased publication with issue 117 in June 1995. But Rob Buckley was part of a group that looked into buying the magazine and keeping it going.

Buckley had spoken to Future Publishing on a number of occasions and he put forward a financial proposal. "The idea was to keep the *AA* name for a few months as WH Smith wouldn't take a new magazine title from an unproven publisher, then after a few issues change to a multiformat C64, Amstrad and Spectrum with cover tape," he says.

"I had the backing of a few of the *AA* freelancers and I'd also sourced a number of coders and artists who'd work on new software for Radical so that the magazine would always have fresh software to review. It was all costed, though I'm not sure how I ever thought it could be viable."

In the end the deal fell through. Had it not done so, Radical Software would have looked at cross-developing games for the Spectrum and Commodore 64.

» [CPC] If there was any criticism of *Masters Of Space*, it was that it was perhaps too short.



"I guess all Radical really does show is the decline in the CPC"

ROB BUCKLEY SUMS UP HIS SOFTWARE COMPANY'S PLACE

Move to publishing

Radical started to take on other people's games too. One of them was a multiplayer puzzler called *Megablasters* by a developer called Odiesoft. Produced in Germany, Buckley had been a pen pal of the developer, and the two agreed that Radical would take over the UK distribution. Radical also put out another game called *Masters Of Space*, written by a coder called Stephen Baker. Receiving 75% in *Amstrad Action*, the sci-fi shoot-'em-up was deemed to be a game that "delivers the goods in the short term, providing high-speed action and a few intriguing twists on the usual vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up formula", but it was criticised for not having more levels.

In 1994, Radical Software released a game called *Who Said That?*, which was a quiz game that threw up classic quotes from the rich and famous and asked you to work out who said them. The same year, *Star Driver* was released. Also written by Baker, it was a technically excellent pacey overhead racer with impressive 3D scrolling and a two-player mode, but it was poorly received, with *Amstrad Action* giving it 45%. Optimistically, reviewer Zy Nicholson said he hoped a sequel would correct the debut game's wrongs. There was no sequel.



Fluff was the last game Radical had developed itself, although Buckley did have plans for more titles, including a *Doom* clone called *Abandoned*. Time was short, though. "Any games I had in the pipeline started to drift as there just wasn't the time to sit down and code that I once had," says Buckley. "In reality the CPC scene wasn't really big enough to support commercial development any more."

For Buckley, Radical Software showed what could be done by one person in a challenging marketplace, but it also highlighted the limitations. "In hindsight, Radical was too niche a company and the Amstrad scene was just too small, with nobody spending money," he says. "For most, the investment they made was buying *Amstrad Action* – the cover tape was the game fix they needed. Ultimately Radical cost me lots of money. I sold very few games but I guess a lot of people thought it was bigger than the one-man band it actually was. I guess all Radical really does show is the decline in the CPC, and that I made very bad decisions about the type of software to create. I enjoyed writing *Fluff*, but it was never going to be viable as a Plus-only game. At the time I thought the Plus fraternity were dying for a decent platformer, which, let's face it, none of them were. I was very wrong. Oh well. You live and learn."

Black Lamp

HOW TO LOSE FRIENDS AND ALIENATE PEOPLE



» ATARI ST
» FIREBIRD
» 1984

Although *Black Lamp* came out on numerous 8 and 16-bit systems, I'll always associate it with the Atari ST. I can remember purposely making friends with a kid at school who was two years younger than I was, simply because his rich parents had bought him an Atari ST for his 13th birthday and I desperately wanted to play on one. Embarrassingly, I can't remember what he looked like or what his name even was, but I'll always remember *Black Lamp* because it put each and every one of my pathetic Amstrad games to shame.

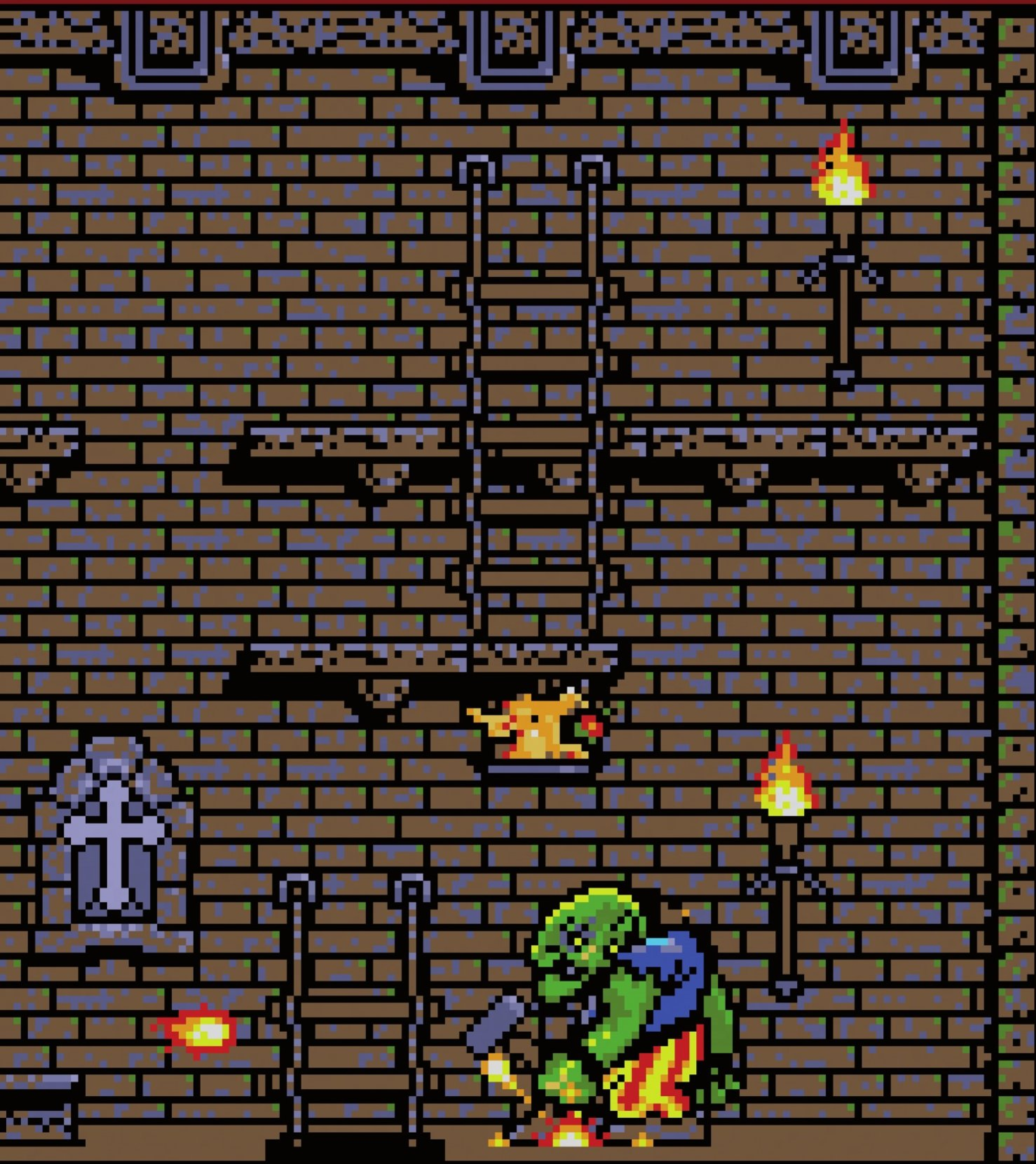
Utterly resplendent thanks to its stunning visuals, it looked like a cartoon come to life and was totally mesmerising to this wide-eyed 15-year-old. I'd sit there patiently, listening to this annoying little kid's chatter, safe in the knowledge that very soon I'd be able to lose myself in the beautiful world of Allegoria and not have to concentrate on his annoying yammering. His parents soon cottoned on to the fact that we weren't really friends, and my days of playing *Black Lamp* and *Xenon 2* came to an abrupt end.

That wasn't the end of my relationship with Firebird's game, however, as I managed to pick up a machine and a copy of the game about ten years later. It was there that we parted ways, because even back in 1998 it was clear to see that *Black Lamp* would never be considered a classic of its time. Insanely tough and featuring amazingly stodgy controls, it was hard to believe that it was the same game I used to enjoy around whatshisname's house. Going back to it for the purpose of this article, my opinion hasn't changed at all.

Certain games will always belong to a specific time, either because they remind you of a particular point in your youth or because it's obvious that they haven't aged well and that your mind would prefer to lock them away, happy with the memories of when they used to be the bee's knees. *Black Lamp* is the perfect example of this, and yet it was still a good three hours before I actually turned the damned thing off. Maybe I'm mellowing with age… *



PLAYER ONE UP.





Hoeing, planting, watering, harvesting and a little bit of courtship. It's all in a day's work for Kim Wild, who tracks down Yasuhiro Wada and talks about the popular series

There are many videogame franchises that have existed over more than a handful of games, but the vast majority revolve around a main character such as Sonic, Mario, Mega Man and even Solid Snake. Few series survive around a basic idea or concept without having a mascot at the helm, yet this is the case for *Harvest Moon*, which has an ever-changing world of characters in each iteration. It's a peaceful, gentle look at the world of farming that encourages playfulness as much as it does creativity, where danger is an unknown concept and violence is forbidden. If joy and happiness could be bottled, then *Harvest Moon* could become an even greater money-making commodity.

Yasuhiro Wada, creator of *Harvest Moon* and director of the series, first became involved with the videogame industry in Tokyo: "At the time, I thought games would be the cutting edge in entertainment, so I applied to a job ad, and got hired!"

A keen games player in his youth, in particular *The Legend Of Zelda*, Wada takes considerable inspiration from Nintendo's output: "I wouldn't say there is always someone who inspires me for each game, but as a creator I have great respect for



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** NATSUME
- » **DEVELOPER:** PACK-IN-VIDEO
- » **PLATFORM:** SNES
- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £30

Will Wright and Shigeru Miyamoto. However, when I get set to come up with game ideas, I make sure to always take concepts from things that aren't related to games."

After spending years working on PC Engine games as a production assistant, Wada would begin a draft for *Bokujo Monogatari* (*Ranch Story*) that originated from living in the countryside. "I wanted to make something that hadn't existed before," he says. "That was the source of my inspiration. At the time, it seemed like games were all about fighting or competition. So, I decided to make a game without fighting and without competition."

Farming, however, is just a small part of *Harvest Moon*'s charm. You have a life to develop, as well as having to attend to your expanding lifestock. From befriending the locals, attending events, expanding your home, there's always something to involve you, including the prospect of love. "The original concept included not just the farming element, but also the element of life simulation, so romance and marriage was not something we could really leave out," explains Wada. "In the concept you could choose from several partners, and if you fulfilled certain conditions you could get married and have a child. This was included in the concept from a very early stage in the development of the first *Harvest Moon*."

While a certain amount of research went into the factual side of farming, many elements were discarded in favour of fun. "When we first started developing *Harvest Moon*, of course we had to research that side, but the concept of *Harvest Moon* was never to be a 'farming' simulation. Instead, it is a 'country living' simulation," says Wada. "As we designed the game, we greatly simplified it, so there are some things that will feel a bit different from reality. We wanted to create a world reminiscent of alpine Europe, sprinkled with machines and inventions and fantasy such as the Harvest Goddess. Quite simply, our main reason for this was that we felt this type of world would be attractive, but this is a fantasy world where there are no predators to devour your livestock, and breeding is done with potions."

"I decided to make a game without fighting and without competition"

What makes *Harvest Moon* all the more appealing is the anime and fairytale style it has to its appearance. "I created this style while debating with the designer," explains Wada. "I decided that I wanted to create a world that was a mix of European alpine dairy land and a bizarre world like that of Akira Toriyama's *Dr Slump*." While huge elements of the game's style do get written down, the overall design comes about through an interchange of ideas: "We do indeed map out our ideas, but we have more documents than anything like a blueprint. The designers and programmers work from those documents and exchange ideas. Finally, we create the final look of the game based on the designer's ideas." This process also applies to the creation of the characters that are so engaging to interact with: "We decide on certain character types at an early stage, and the concept designer fleshes them out from there. An example would be a 'sister-type with spectacles', or a 'poster girl for the pub'. It's quite vague, but we try to avoid having these types overlap as we sketch them out."

For all its ideals, the development of *Harvest Moon* itself ran into considerable difficulties. The external developer that helped with production went bankrupt, while the main team faced major restructuring. "The first *Harvest Moon* took us three and a half years," recalls Wada. "Two years into it, our ten-man development team was disbanded once, and only the main members of

» [SNES] This is what happens when you mix your drinks at the office party.





» [SNES] Fishing is a useful way to earn extra money while waiting for crops to grow.



» [SNES] When you first get the farm, there is a lot of debris to sort through.



» [Wii] *Rune Factory Frontier* on the Wii is a new change in direction for the series and is a fantastic addition to the franchise.



» [SNES] Sound advice for courting the ladies. Regular gifts also help.

that team stayed on. In the end we finished it up with an incredibly small team of just those three."

When it came to the release of the game, the title changed from *Ranch Story* to the now-familiar *Harvest Moon*. Although the release of the game in Europe came quite late into the Super Nintendo's lifespan, with it hitting our shores in 1998, it still managed to build up a following and planted the seeds for the franchise to grow. Not only did it become a hit among players, but it also went on to receive accolades from the media, showering it with praise for its unique style.

"Initially in Japan we only sold about 20,000," says Wada, "but we got some good reviews and word spread. In the end we broke 100,000 sales. The game was then localised for the US and EU, and went on to sell just as well in those territories." The limited print run of the SNES game means it is highly sought after by collectors, although the four *Harvest Moon* episodes released through Japan's Satellaview satellite modem service for the Super Famicom in 1996 are the most collectable and elusive ones of all.

As a concept, the series has progressed significantly, yet there are still areas of life that Wada is keen to explore. "At the very beginning I was quite torn between having more 'real' elements such as divorce and predation," he explains. "Also, I'd like to beef up some of the simulation elements such as the development you see in *Island Of Happiness* and *Magical Melody*. That's something I'd like to make a reality."

One of the main difficulties for each game, particularly for Europe, is the aspect of translation, as Wada explains: "It takes six months to a year, depending on the volume of text. It is especially difficult to make the European version because we localise into many languages. I think we will be able to streamline the process as we've become more experienced." It's something that becomes increasingly noticeable between each console release, and explains why it takes so long for us to catch up with America and Japan, while some games in the series don't even make the journey. Infuriating as it is from the perspective of a gamer – Japan is about to experience *Rune Factory 3*, part of the spin-off fantasy series, on the Nintendo DS, while we are only just reaching the second – translating each game is something of an undertaking. Cultural differences are also an area that have to be considered – while the *Harvest Moon* games in Japan think nothing of serving alcohol as refreshments, North American versions of the game have to settle for juice instead.

"We wanted to create a world reminiscent of alpine Europe, sprinkled with machines and inventions and fantasy"

The series has gone from strength to strength, made all the more evident by the fact that there are 19 – yes, really – games released and counting. As a result, the franchise has flourished on multiple consoles, including the N64, PlayStation, PS2, PSP, Game Boy Color, Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS, GameCube and Wii. While this has meant that it has suffered from over-familiarity, recent entries such as *Rune Factory* on the DS and the Wii have proven that it is still possible to keep the franchise fresh by adding in some new ingredients. *Rune Factory* combines farming with RPG elements that see you battling monsters and

Give Us A Job



PAPERBOY

Have you ever fancied a paper round but didn't like the idea of the exercise or being exposed to rainy weather? Then this is the game for you. With hazards to avoid, subscribers to deliver to, new customers to attract and an obstacle course, can you last all week?



TAPPER

Tom Cruise may have made bartending glamorous in *Cocktail*, but it sure isn't easy. Serve the beers to the punters before they get angry in this arcade classic, and don't forget to clear up the empties when they have finished. If you're lucky, you may even earn yourself a nice tip.



POSTMAN PAT

Yes, the graphics haven't aged well and the handling isn't as smooth as we remember it, but there is something that's still endearing about this game and the world of *Postman Pat*, and we have spent many a happy hour delivering mail to the villagers. At least this mail man won't go on strike.



TRASHMAN

It's a rubbish job, but someone's got to do it! At least with this Spectrum classic, an otherwise smelly occupation can be enjoyed from your own home. Collect each dustbin, then empty and replace before time runs out, making sure to avoid dogs and kids, who are out to slow you down.



CRAZY TAXI

Although there have been many games available focused on the world of taxiing, it's this Dreamcast classic that keeps us coming back for more. Chaotic driving, taking short cuts and delivering customers to their destination is the most fun you can have in charge of a speeding vehicle. Taxi!



» [SNES] All crops need to be watered daily if they are to grow into vegetables.



finding old relics. The series' change in direction is part of Wada's plan to prevent the quality of the gameplay dipping. "*Harvest Moon* is the main pillar of our business," he affirms, "but if we relied too much on it there would be a chance that the quality would decline. These two titles came about from an idea to let some important game creators make use of the *Harvest Moon* system, and thereby achieve a balance between the creative and business aspects while maintaining the quality of the series and spreading out releases."

Of all the *Harvest Moon* games that exist, though, surely Wada has a favourite? "I don't have my heart set on any one platform, but personally I am most fond of *Harvest Moon 64*. I really love *A Wonderful Life*, and more recently, *Animal Parade*, coming to Europe soon."

What is the secret to the series' success? "I don't know," admits the creator. "Of course, I made it with the hope that it would bring happiness to many people, but I honestly didn't think it would last this long. My hunch is that there aren't many other games like it."

The videogame industry has changed considerably since the early days of the Super Nintendo and is something that Wada has come to notice with regret: "Speaking about the industry as a whole, just too much has changed to list it all. Currently, the industry is split between a small number of very hardcore games, and an ocean of too casual games. Anything in between those extremes is going to face difficulties in becoming successful. It's the old problem of the chicken and the egg. I don't know what caused this, but as time goes on, I've seen many publishers merge and small studios have become obsolete. As a result, it has become more difficult to get novel titles made, and the selection available to players has shrunk. It's a very difficult situation." It's a sad fact that has greatly affected developer Natsume, which has had to abandon more original concepts due to financial constraints.

But with so many games currently available and even more in the pipeline, where does Wada feel the future lies? "The future lies in creating the ultimate social simulation, something in which both beginners and veteran players can discover their own pleasure. In order to provide the most enjoyable experience to as many players as possible, there are many problems to overcome. From there, I would like to evolve the series little by little over time." And for the next project? "I wish I could fill you in on all the ideas I'm working on right now, but I really can't tell you just yet," he answers cryptically.

We are confident that regardless of what those ideas prove to be, *Harvest Moon* will forever remain proof of the fact that innocent, non-violent and charming games have a place within an industry that seems intent on filling itself with guns and destruction at every turn.



Girl Power

WHEN *HARVEST MOON* became more successful and it appealed to a wider audience, it became apparent that there was one area that was lacking: the ability to be a female farmer. Natsume picked up on this desire and started to release editions catering to this new demographic. The most obvious ones include *More Friends Of Mineral Town* on the Game Boy Advance and *Another Wonderful Life* for the GameCube, which were the originals remoulded so you could play as a girl and have potential husbands. Sadly, none of these titles were released in Europe, and when the GameCube classic *Magical Melody* received a Wii conversion – the original featured both sexes as well as all possible partner choices – the option to play as a female farmer and all that entailed was mysteriously removed. Both gender choices have been re-introduced in *Tree Of Tranquility* and the more recent DS titles.



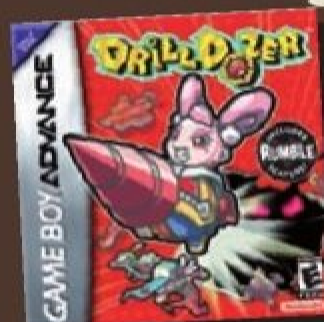




Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come





INFO

- **Featured System:** GBA
- **Year Released:** 2005
- **Publisher:** Nintendo
- **Developer:** Game Freak
- **Key People:** Ken Sugimori (designer), Thomas Connery (translation), Eric Peterson (writer)
- **Buy it for:** £5+

GO DEEPER

- **The game was originally known as *Screw Breaker* in Japan before being renamed for release in Western countries**
- ***Drill Dozer* is the first non-*Pokémon* game released by Game Freak in seven years**



03. DRILL DOZER

Kim Wild likes nothing better than destroying immovable objects, so who better to drill their way through this Nintendo classic?

THE BACKGROUND

Drill Dozer was such a low-key release that very little is known of its original conception. It was unveiled at a trade show in 2005 before its subsequent release in Japan in September that year and arrived in America and Europe in 2006. In a nice touch, the game also arrived with a mini-comic, further adding to its appeal. The translation of the game to English was undertaken by Treehouse employees Thomas Connery and Erik Peterson. Connery translated the game in its entirety, while Peterson rewrote the jokes to cater for a Western audience. He was also responsible for naming many of the characters and locations. Although these alterations were made, Jill's character was left very much intact, with Peterson quoted in an interview as saying that: "We really didn't have to make any changes to Jill – she's already such an interesting character. For me, the Drill Dozer is just as much of a character as Jill. In one area, Jill is separated from the Drill Dozer and you've got to pilot the robot through the level while you search for her." Despite receiving accolades and glowing reviews across the board, *Drill Dozer* wasn't much of a commercial success and dashed any possibility of a sequel.

THE GAME

Jill, complete with her robotic mech, is part of a bandit gang called the Red Dozers. Her father, Doug, leader of the gang, was ambushed by rivals the Skulkers, who in the process stole the red diamond, a gift from Jill's dearly departed mother. It's Jill's aim to retrieve the stolen diamond while recovering other treasures along the way. As a side-scrolling platformer, control of the dozer is where the bulk of the action lies, with the shoulder buttons used to operate the drilling motion forwards and backwards. Controls are simple to use, and the in-game tutorials that appear every time you need a new move mean that the learning

Things of note











The Pokémon effect

Although the concept is entirely unique, many of the sound effects in *Drill Dozer* have been recycled from Game Freak's *Pokémon* games and will be familiar to numerous Nintendo fans.

Upgrading your drill

Bog standard to start with, you'll need to collect extra gears to power up your drill and bypass some of the more tricky obstacles in your way and further expand your abilities as you progress through the adventure.

Digging for treasure

While the path to the end of a level can be linear, the ability to drill through other areas allows you to locate hidden treasure. When the walls themselves are often passable, things aren't always as they seem.

Bosses

You'll be encountering plenty of bosses throughout your treacherous journey through *Drill Dozer*, from small ones mid-level to huge robots at the end, determined to wipe out your destructive drill.

Cameo

Drill Dozer may not have received a sequel, but the main character, Jill, and her drill can be found as an Assist Trophy and as a collectable item hidden away in *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.



» [GBA] You won't just need a drill for destroying objects. It's also useful for moving across levels.





» [GBA] Levels can be revisited once you buy upgrades for your drill to locate hidden treasures.

What the press thought



games™
Score: 7/10
"[*Drill Dozer*] is a charming addition to a crowded genre that stands proudly next to classics such as *Mario Advance*."

IGN UK
Score: 8.0/10
"Game Freak's latest combines a fresh play mechanic with a dose of good old-fashioned platforming."

curve is perfectly placed. Although you may have a drill, it's not without its limitations, and this is where the game really shines. Certain barriers will require high-level gears to destroy, so exploration and a little dexterity will be needed to locate them in order to move on. Levels are tightly designed, however, so backtracking is kept to a minimum, and it's always apparent what must happen next.

While every platformer has to include a jump button, you won't be using this as much as you may think, as timing and strategy is the key to success. Learning to make the most of the drill, which can deflect bullets and destroy robots, as well as any objects in your way, is paramount, and it can also be used to operate machinery. Inevitably, each level has an epic boss to defeat, while some have mini-bosses to keep you on your toes. In between stages, you can visit the shopkeeper to upgrade your robot, save your progress and check out any treasures that may have been collected along the way.

As to be expected from Game Freak, the visuals have a colourful anime style that, in their simplicity, manage to exude character. Banter between the characters takes place throughout the levels, and in between stages little cut-scenes take place, which all help to shape the personality of the game. Audio plays a key part in progress, with small sounds signifying when you are coming closer to destroying walls or hitting obstacles that you just aren't strong enough to destroy yet.

The built-in rumble feature is something that really makes the game come alive. Some games may use it as a novelty, yet with *Drill Dozer* it's hard to imagine playing without it. Every rumble that vibrates through the console as you use your drill puts you firmly into the role of Jill and makes it a tactile experience. The fact that the strength of the rumble effect alters according to the pressure of the drill is a nice touch that shows how much thought has been put into the game. It may be complete coincidence, but the cartridge itself has small holes located on the outside, almost as if someone has taken a drill to it. What are the odds of that?



WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

It's certainly not an obvious choice when you think of Nintendo games, as many gamers would naturally think of *Mario*, *Zelda*, *Pokémon* and the *Wario* series as more fitting parts of a handheld collection. Yet to ignore *Drill Dozer* would be doing the game a disservice, as it has all the makings of a classic title. While it was criminally overlooked by most GBA owners at the time of its release, no doubt due in part to its late arrival during the handheld's lifespan and receiving very little promotion from Nintendo, it's an essential purchase for anyone who appreciates platformers with a touch of originality. The well-constructed levels that encourage you to explore, along with imaginative bosses, means that *Drill Dozer* is constantly full of surprises. The drip feed of moves that your drill can unleash staggered throughout the game's levels means that an otherwise repetitive gameplay mechanic manages to feel fresh at all times. With 17 levels to explore and bountiful treasures to collect, you'll certainly be firing up your drill again for one last whirl. *Drill Dozer* is a gem of a game that, once unearthed, is well worth holding on to.



ALLAN ALCORN

Allan Alcorn was there at the very beginning of videogames. He created Pong, the arcade industry's first hit, and had a pivotal role at Atari through the Seventies, watching it grow from a garage operation to a billion-dollar company. Paul Drury gets to call him Al

He may be best known for creating *Pong*, but Allan 'Al' Alcorn also had a hand in many other pioneering products. As vice president of engineering at Atari, he oversaw such early successes as *Tank* and *Breakout*, before helping the company move into the consumer market. His work on the ground-breaking VCS saw Atari become the dominant force in gaming until the industry crash of the mid-Eighties brought the party abruptly to an end. We talk to him about wire-wraps, hot tubs and what really happened at Andy Capp's Tavern all those years ago…



RETRO GAMER: We want to start by taking you back to September 1972 and Andy Capp's Tavern in Sunnyvale, California, the location of the very first *Pong* machine. Did you personally lug the thing over there?

AL ALCORN: Nolan [Bushnell] and I took it over after work, on a Monday or Tuesday I think, because the cabinet was built by Ted Dabney over the weekend. It was in a side room with about four pinball machines and I remember there was an original *Computer Space* right next to it. That prototype was a tabletop machine, with just the word *Pong* on, a coin slot and no instructions. We popped it on top of a wine barrel, bought a beer and watched what happened.

RG: In the book *Zap! The Rise And Fall Of Atari*, there's an incredibly detailed description of how two of the regulars put in a quarter and slowly worked out how to have a rally. Then everyone in the bar had a go, people were queuing up to play it the next morning and the machine crashed that night because it was so full of quarters…

AA: Unfortunately the guy that wrote that book [Scott Cohen in 1984] never travelled west of the Mississippi river. Many of the facts and names in that book are wrong, which is kind of sad, as it was great to have someone write about what we'd done, but the guy just based it on articles he'd read and just made stuff up.

RG: So what really happened that night?

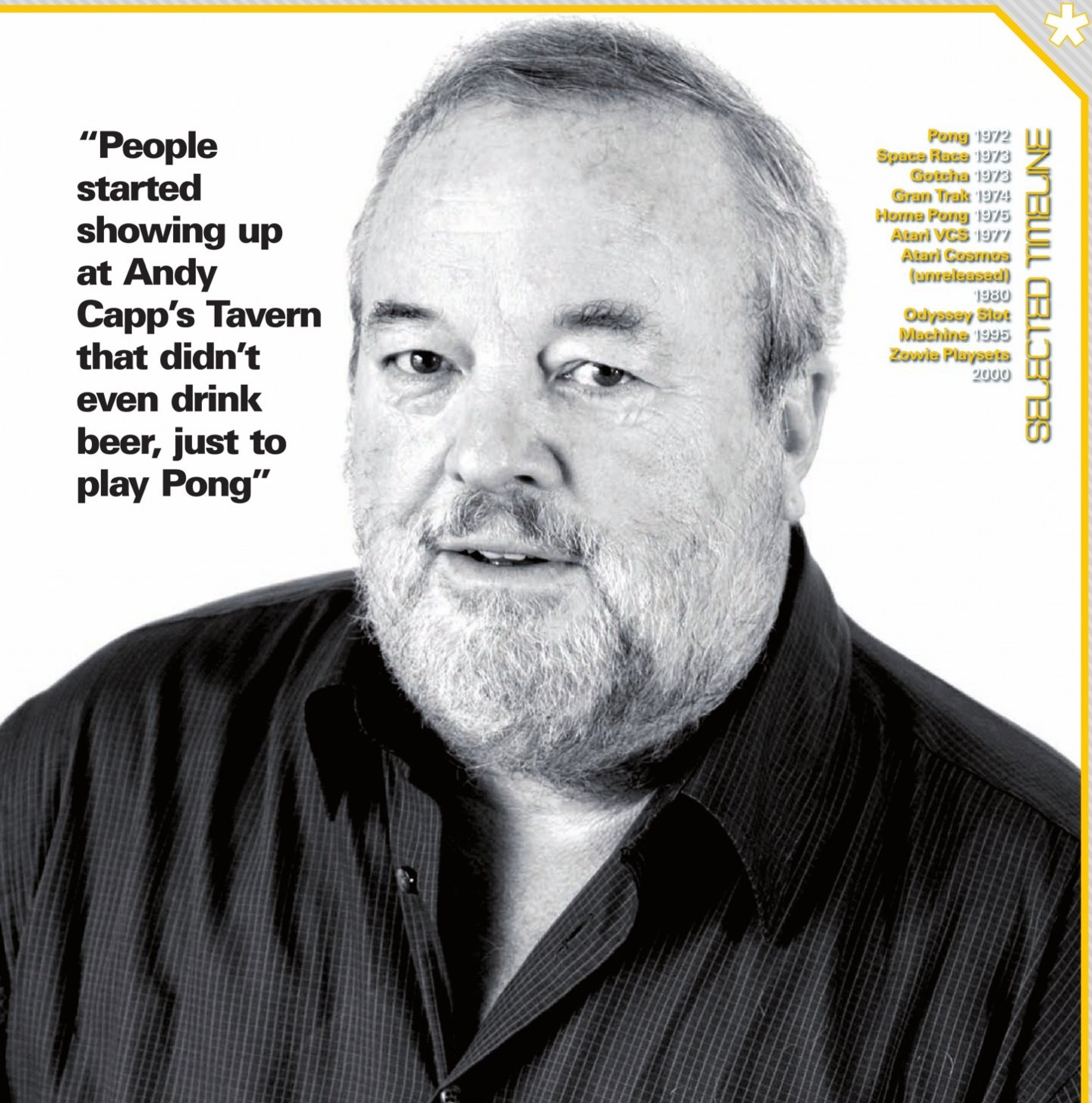
AA: In the half an hour it took to drink our beers, a couple of guys came over and played the machine. They managed to play a game – it didn't need instructions, it was so obvious what you had to do. Nolan went over and said, "What do you think?" They started bullshitting right away, saying, 'Yeah we know the guys who made this.' I was thinking, 'Why don't you save the bullshit for the ladies?' I guess we were in Silicon Valley and nothing surprised these guys. I don't think it got played again that night.

RG: So you didn't get an angry call from the bar owner the next day saying the machine was broken?

AA: Yeah, that's bullshit too. When we started Syzygy [Bushnell and Dabney's original company that became Atari] we had a route of about 50 pinball machines and driving games that Nolan had bought with the royalties from *Computer Space*. We had them at maybe 20 locations and I learned a lot about arcade machines from doing that route. Andy Capp's was one of our better locations. We knew the owner, Bill Gattiss, and he was very co-operative. If anything went wrong, he'd call.

RG: So there weren't people queuing up outside the next day, desperate to play *Pong*?

AA: Actually, that was the first inkling something was weird. Bill told us that a certain set of customers turn up at nine in the morning: alcoholics drinking right after breakfast. All of a sudden, Bill said people started showing up that didn't even drink beer, just to play *Pong*. Turns out they were from another company and proceeded to make a copy of the game – Ramtron, I think they were called. It was an honest clone in that they built it themselves from our design. The other sleazy companies just copied our board to build



"People started showing up at Andy Capp's Tavern that didn't even drink beer, just to play Pong"

SELECTED TIMELINE

Pong 1972
Space Race 1973
Gotcha 1973
Gran Trak 1974
Home Pong 1975
Atari VCS 1977
Atari Cosmos (unreleased) 1980
Odyssey Slot Machine 1995
Zowie Playsets 2000

machines; they didn't even know how it worked.

RG: And did the coin box ever get so full the machine stopped working?

AA: About a week or ten days later, I did get a call from Bill saying that the machine wasn't working. It didn't surprise me. That prototype was so poorly made, if you'd banged on it, it would've stopped working. I went down to fix it after work and some people were there waiting and were quite upset. It had gained a following, which surprised me. I opened the coin box to get a free game and saw the problem – it was packed with quarters.

RG: How much money do you think was in there?

AA: About $100. That was a surprise, too. 400 games of *Pong* in a week. I told Nolan and he said, "That's interesting…"

RG: Is that the moment you realised that videogames were the future?

AA: God, no! We were just a small engineering company. There were five of us: Nolan, me, a secretary named Cynthia, Ted and his brother. The plan was to do contract work for companies like Bally, but Nolan had crazy ideas. He told me *Pong* was actually a design for a home game for General Electrics, which was a lie. It was bullshit but was supposed to inspire me to work hard and make this simple, primitive game, which he didn't think was going to be any good. He was going to throw it away!

RG: Did it bother you when you realised Nolan had lied to you?

AA: Oh no. You have to know Nolan! I'm an engineer and this was an interesting challenge. Then Nolan wanted to make 100 a day right off the bat! We had no money, no manufacturing, there were only five of us… my wife remembers me coming home and saying, 'he's f***ing crazy!' But we grew so fast it was kind of unworldly. I was 24 years old and I'd been at Berkeley in the Sixties. This whole capitalism thing, I didn't really take it seriously. By the time I realised it was a lie, we were all too busy making these machines. I might have been pissed if it had been a flop, but we had a tiger by the tail.

RG: You were born and raised in San Francisco. Did you wear flowers in your hair?

* FIVE TO PLAY

PONG



IT MIGHT NOT have been the first coin-op machine, but this is where the industry really began. Pong didn't so much epitomise Bushnell's mantra that games should be 'easy to learn, difficult to master', it prompted the realisation in the first place and thus introduced gaming to the masses. The graphics might be as minimal as they come, but you'll still be surprised how gripping an extended rally can be, becoming almost a battle of wills as much as dexterity. The simple gameplay was given some subtlety too, as Al split the bat into eight segments, with three vertical speeds, plus two straight shots in the middle, allowing some last-second wrist work to send your return of serve spinning out of reach of your opponent. And of course there was that lovely hollow ringing sound when ball struck bat, as evocative of childhood as the school bell or ice cream jingle.

ATARI VCS



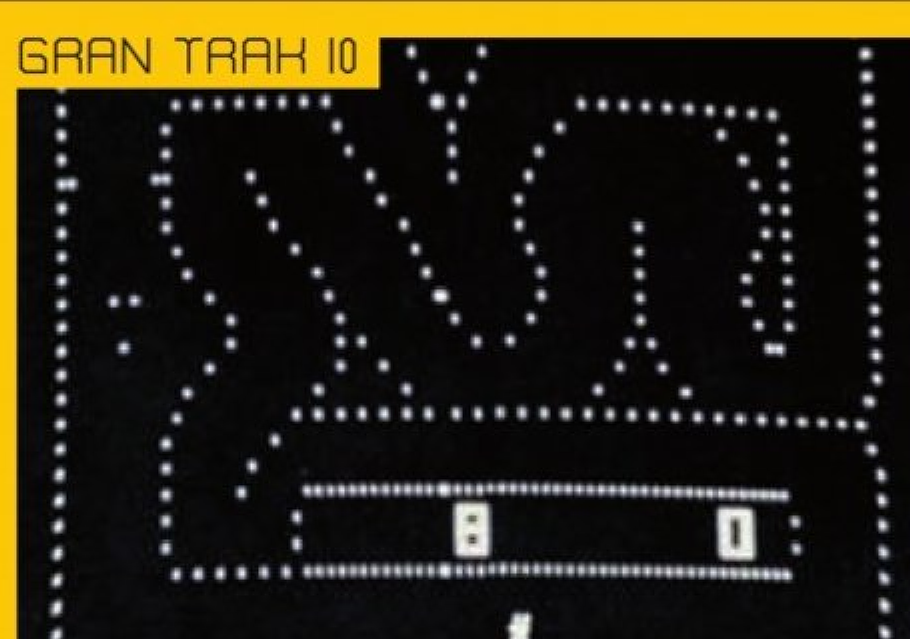
AGAIN, THIS WASN'T the first home games console nor was it the first to use cartridges, but it was the one that brought electronic entertainment into the front rooms of millions of homes. The original vision for the VCS was simply to play *Pong*, Tank and a driving game, but it ended up being the dominant console platform for the next decade. Al: "One of the best things I ever did was have on the team Jay Miner, the most brilliant silicon architect of the time, Ron Milner, who'd worked on the prototype and Larry Wagner, a software guy, because I wanted us to be writing games while we were making the chip so I could change the hardware to make the software better."

HOME PONG



ON THIS SIDE of the pond, it was probably unlikely you played *Pong* on Atari's home console, but without the technical wizardry of Al and his team which put the game on a single chip, you wouldn't have spent the Seventies playing on your Grandstand, Prinztronic or any one of the multitude of copycat systems, arguing with your mum about how this was better than watching *Opportunity Knocks* 'as a family.' The home version was first marketed under Sears' Tele-Games label, before the success led Atari to manufacture its own model, a rather stylish and sturdily built offering with its logo prominently displayed on the front.

GRAN TRAK 10



DRIVING GAMES HAD been a staple of arcades in the electro-mechanical days and this very early digital version established several features, such as checkpoints and inconveniently placed oil slicks, which would become mainstays of the genre. This first iteration only had you as a single driver racing against the clock, but *Gran Trak 20* added a second player, and *Indy 800*, released through Kee Games, increased the grid count to eight and brought colour to videogames for the first time. The top-down racer was to be further developed through the *Sprint* series and perusing download services for modern consoles suggests there is still mileage in the genre.

GOTCHA



A REAL ODDITY, and not just because it remains the only game to model its control panel on lady bumps. The pink, breast-like mouldings encased two joysticks, used to control a square in hot pursuit of a cross. One player would be the hunter, while a second would try to elude capture as they traversed an ever-changing maze. Though it offers little entertainment value today, it is arguably the first example of a maze game, if you don't count *Hunt The Wumpus*. To say it's a direct ancestor of *Pac-Man* may be pushing it, but the theme of pursuer and pursued dashing through a labyrinth means the two titles nicely bookend the first decade of arcade games.

AA: Throughout my high school years, I lived right near the corner of Haight Ashbury.
RG: Wasn't that the centre of Flower Power?
AA: I've been at the centre of all types of shit! I've had a very interesting life.
RG: They say if you remember the Sixties you weren't really there…
AA: I remember Ken Kesey and the Kool Aid acid test, though I was too young to go to one. Thank God. I was involved with People's Park, which was like a student hippie commune, and I was there when they dropped tear gas on it from helicopters, which was kind of funny. There was rioting and shootings…
RG: So did you turn on, tune in and drop out like a proper hippie?
AA: I actually started out as a football jock. That's what helped me get into the University of California at Berkeley. I played football for Cal for one week. It was either be a football player or an electrical engineer and I chose the latter.

RG: Was that a tough choice?

AA: Oh, I was always a nerd. I fixed televisions from the age of 12. I worked my way through college fixing TVs for repair shops. I always wanted to be an electrical engineer… whatever that was.

RG: So did you end up playing Space War in the computer labs all night?
AA: No… we had mainframes at Cal but you couldn't touch them! Nolan had graduated from Utah, which in the Sixties was one of only places to have a PDP-1. He saw Space War on that machine and he had also worked at an amusement park in Utah in the summer. He started to connect the dots… how can we translate a game on a million-dollar computer to the arcade?
RG: You actually met Nolan Bushnell at Ampex. How did you end up working there?
AA: I landed this great job in my third year at Cal: six months at Ampex and six months in school. The plan was to make enough money to pay my way through college. Did I? No, I pissed it away on beer and women. I still had the TV repair job though, so it was fine.

RG: What were your first impressions of Nolan?
AA: He was an engaging, talkative guy. He didn't impress me as a great engineer but he was an entrepreneur. I mean, in the late Sixties, he set up a club to buy and sell stock at a time when you had to be a rich man and know somebody to buy stock. He started to work on this game *Computer Space* in the evenings and he left Ampex to join Nutting Associates. We thought he'd made a terrible mistake. If you got a job at Ampex, you worked there for life. You got your gold watch! To throw that away and go and do something called videogames… the president of Ampex, Charlie Steinberg, even called Nolan in and told him he was making a big mistake.
RG: So when Nolan and Ted Dabney asked you to leave Ampex and join them at Syzygy, surely you were making the same big mistake?



» He may be semi-retired now, but Al's working with three fellow veterans on "something in a new area".

> " My attitude was: I don't want to do something if it's been done before. Where's the fun in that? "

AA: I was young and thought, 'Gee, this is crazy,' but I thought if I join a little company, I'll have to learn about the entire process, not just engineering – buying, manufacturing, hiring and all that stuff. I figured it would fail in a year or two and then I'd come back to Ampex. What the hell? This was the Sixties, we had the Cold War… live life!
RG: When you began at Syzygy, we've read that Nolan first suggested doing a driving game…
AA: I think that was made up. *Computer Space* was reasonably successful but not a big splash. Nolan thought the winning game might be something more complex, maybe like a driving game. But once *Pong* took off, he realised maybe the games don't have to be more complex, they need to be simple and pleasing. That's where the sweet spot is!
RG: So how did Nolan actually describe the game that became *Pong* to you? Did he give you a detailed design document?
AA: Oh no, it was just a very general goal: let's create a ping pong game on a TV screen where you're looking down on it. One spot that moves, two paddles… just to get that on the screen with the limited technology we had was pretty exciting for me.
RG: It's been well documented that Nolan Bushnell visited the Magnavox Profit Caravan in May 1972 and saw Ralph Baer's tennis game playing. Were you aware that that was what he was basing his description on?



AA: What people don't realise is, you know that movie *The Producers* by Mel Brooks? This was just like that! He picked a game that he thought was a dog but was very simple. He was going to throw it away! Copying someone else's game isn't a problem if you're never going to sell it, right? Well guess what? It became a f***ing hit, just like in the movie!
RG: So *Pong* was like Springtime For Hitler? Did Magnavox see the funny side?
AA: We got this letter from them pointing out patents and we're like, 'What? That's bullshit!' But in the end we got a paid-up licence… everyone else had to pay royalties.
RG: In retrospect, *Pong* seems an incredibly simple game, but when you were creating it, did you actually agonise over the size of bat, the speed of ball, the angle of the bounce and the like?
AA: [laughs] Nolan had just said a ping pong game, that's all. In the first version I got working, the ball only went at one speed and that wasn't much fun. So I talked to Nolan and Ted and built a circuit that made the ball speed up and, hey, this is more fun! It evolved. As for ball size and stuff, everything was based on expediency – whatever worked!

Remember, I was trying to make something simple and Nolan had told me it was for a home game so keeping costs down was primary. Like, the paddle didn't go to the top of the screen, which was a design flaw, but I soon realised that was critically important because a good player could always win eventually by getting it over the top of the other guy's bat. If I hadn't put that in accidentally, the game would've been a failure because people could have played it forever.



My motto was: if you can't fix something, call it a feature!

RG: You sound like Bill Gates…

AA: I taught him everything he knows!

RG: Atari ended up releasing a string of *Pong* sequels – *Pong Doubles, Quadrapong, Puppy Pong, Spike* (which was essentially *Pong* on its side)… the modern games industry gets a lot of criticism for flooding the market with endless sequels, but didn't you start all that?

AA: [laughs] Yes we did, but we tried not to! It was what the customers wanted. The second game I designed, *Space Race*, didn't do very well and the third, *Gotcha*, which was really a precursor to *Pac-Man* – those were done before *Pong Doubles*. Doing a four-player *Pong* was technically uninteresting to me so I hired someone else to do that work. I get bored easily!

RG: You even put *Pong* in a barrel didn't you?

AA: Yeah. They were actually old wine barrels. And smelt like it.

RG: Were there any other weird places you contemplated putting that *Pong* board in?

AA: Nolan was full of them! Jesus Christ! You've seen *Breakout*, right? That was just another variation on *Pong*. Nolan convinced Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak to do that behind my back because I didn't want to do it.

RG: As well as all the versions of *Pong* produced by Atari, there were a slew of copycat games from other companies. How annoying was that to you?

AA: Very! My recollection, which is different to Nolan's, is we only shipped 3,000 *Pong* machines, but there were 10 or 20,000 made. That was money we should've earned. But we had something that the copiers didn't: the next game.

RG: One of the results of all this new competition was Ted Dabney sold his share of the company to Nolan and left. How did that make you feel?

AA: Oh boy. Atari was in a period of rapid growth, it was out of control, and we all had to adapt and do new things. We had all been engineers at Ampex and had been very protected in our little boxes and suddenly we had to get into manufacturing, materials, shipping… it just wasn't Ted's thing. Ted was a dear friend and it broke my heart that it didn't work out.

RG: Earlier you mentioned *Gotcha*, your third game for Atari. Was getting a maze up on screen a challenge?

AA: *Gotcha* was inspired by a defective Pong circuit board. You had 70 or so chips and typically you would have one or two bad ones every time you built a board. The score circuit on one screwed up and there were these segments all over the screen. We were like, 'Hey look at that, we could use that!'

RG: And what exactly inspired the controller setup on that game, which closely resembles part of the female anatomy?

AA: The boobs were the idea of George Fracco, a guy we hired to make our machines look more interesting. We only made about ten with controllers that looked like breasts. Real collectors' items.

RG: Didn't Nolan ask you to produce a 20-player version of Gotcha by linking up multiple cabinets?

AA: He was gushing with ideas. It was hard as an engineer to keep up! That was planned but never built.

RG: Despite the early success with *Pong* and its various offshoots, by 1974 Atari seemed to have been in a real mess, with huge debts and staff layoffs. How did that come about?

AA: It was kind of complex. We had started our own competition with Kee Games and that was well run by Joe Keenan. We gave him our designs and Steve Bristow, one of our best engineering guys, and they did a pretty good job.

We'd bitch to the distributors about Kee, 'Those bastards stole our designs; they stole our engineers', and they loved it! They would run right down the road and talk to Kee Games about us! That was why it was so much fun working with Nolan. We would even play games with our own customers.

> "We turned up at the June '77 CES with the VCS and it blew everyone away"

RG: Creating a supposed rival in Kee Games so you could get around exclusivity deals with distributors was a clever idea. Why, then, did Atari end up on the brink of ruin?

AA: Nolan had read this book about growing companies and the thesis was that the people you use to start a company are not the same people you use to grow the company when it gets over a million dollars. We'd made over a million in the first year so he set about hiring people to replace me and the VPs of finance, marketing and manufacturing. He hired people with no experience of coin-op or innovation. Like, he hired a Christian psychiatrist as the president. Very strange. Long story short: it was a disaster. They ruined everything and Atari almost tanked.

RG: So Nolan actually replaced you? You must have been livid.

AA: Well, at the same time my mother was dying of cancer, so it meant I could be with her for the three months when all this was happening. She passed away and shortly afterwards I got a call from Ron Gordon, our marketing guy, saying, "Get back here, goddammit!"

RG: What did you find on your return?

AA: The banks had stopped loaning us money, our suppliers were cutting us off… Nolan broke down in tears, which I'd never seen before. We went out to a restaurant together and Ron got busy bringing the right people back and merging us with Kee Games. Joe became president of Atari and I was back as VP of engineering.



*NUMBER CRUNCHING

Al was employee number **3** at Atari

The number of points required to win a game of arcade *Pong* is **11**. In the home version it's **15**

The number of simultaneous players in *Gran Trak 10* is **1**. The number of simultaneous players in *Gran Trak 20* is **2**. See what it did there?

The launch price of Atari's home *Pong*, marketed through Sears' Tele-Games label, was **$98.95**, a number Al says that Nolan Bushnell 'pulled out his ass'

Upwards of **26** million VCS consoles were sold during its long lifespan

The number of games built in to Alcorn's Cosmos handheld console was **8**

$39 million: Atari's revenue in **1975**

$1.1 billion: Atari's revenue in **1983**

$539 million: the losses posted by Atari in the same year

RG: And did you find any games ready to ship?

AA: *Gran Trak* was ready to go but it had been engineered by my predecessor who'd done such a terrible job it simply wouldn't work on location. My first job back at Atari was to redesign the game so it could be built. And it was a hit!

RG: The success of *Gran Trak* and then *Tank*, which Lyle Rains and Steve Bristow had worked on at Kee Games, put your coin-op division back on track. Was this when you decided to try to move into the consumer market?

AA: I have a memo from Nolan dated August 1973 listing a bunch of stuff I had to do. Item six is home *Pong*. Basically, the consumer videogame industry is number six on the list! And it interested me. Back then no one made custom chips. I thought, 'I wonder how far I can take this?'

RG: You got together with Bob Brown and Harold Lee…

AA: What a tag team they were. We three designed this chip, AMI manufactured it and when it came back, the damn thing worked! We had no business plan or any idea how many we were going to build. I really hadn't thought the thing was going to work. It was like when a dog chases a car: what does he do when he catches it? We looked at each other and said, 'Holy shit, what do we do now?' Back then no one in Silicon Valley did consumer products. We called Sears and Roebuck and they were incredibly helpful, especially Tom Quinn. It never would've got done without him.

RG: So things went smoothly from then on?

AA: Oh God, no. There were so many hurdles to getting home *Pong* done. Like, we were demoing it to the executive board in Sears Tower on one of their colour TVs. I had this wire-wrap prototype, two big planes with about 200 ICs on them, in a wooden box. It didn't work and then I realised I was using Channel 3 and they broadcast the signal for Channel 3 from the top of the building I was in! I had to open this thing up and retune it in front of all these vice presidents, but we got it to work.



» A flyer produced for the unreleased Cosmos holographic console, the great granddaddy of the 3DS.

RG: You seem to have been making it up as you went along…

AA: Oh, we had no idea what we were doing. Like with pricing, Nolan just pulled a number out his ass and it worked. Sears were incredibly supportive and wanted us to just sell it to them but we thought, 'No let's take it to the Toy Fair in New York City'. We didn't realise that the buyers had already done all the deals before the show, so we sat in a booth with this f***ing *Pong* machine, which we thought was going to be the hit of the decade, and none of the buyers from all the big retailers showed any interest at all. That business is very staid, very conservative and very stupid.



» *Space Race* was released the year after *Pong* but failed to replicate its success.

RG: Thanks to Sears' faith in you, home *Pong* was the must-have toy of 1975 and Atari made $39m in sales that year. Was it all fast cars and loose women? You can tell us.

AA: I deny the allegation and I defy the alligators! We had a lot of fun and we made a lot of great products. Other people had more fun with the ladies than me. We didn't take ourselves too seriously and I think we changed the way people in the Valley behaved. We didn't wear suits and ties, which was unheard of at that time. I mean, Steve Jobs worked for me and he didn't wear shoes. He didn't bathe much either…

RG: Talking of bathing, did you spend much time in the infamous Atari hot tub?

AA: We knew our assets were our engineers and we wanted to treat them well because if we lost them, they were hard to replace. We had a work-out room, but people were afraid to use it because, back then, you didn't sit in a hot tub in the middle of the working day. So one day, Nolan and some of us went over there, took off our clothes and jumped in. We were drinking wine and partying and others joined us, including some ladies. I remember a young employee who'd just started there was giving his parents a tour and he pointed to the hot tub and said, "There's the chairman of the board, there's the VP of engineering…"

RG: It's an interesting management strategy…

AA: Our attitude was, look we all have stock in the company, here are our goals, let's work very hard

to achieve them but I managed by objective. I didn't say you had to be there at 8am. If you never showed up and still got the job done, great! Tell me how you did it, I'd like to pull that off too! We'd work all day and night when we had to, but we made time for parties and special events.

RG: At what point did you begin work on the VCS?

AA: At first we just thought 'My God, we've got a whole game on a single chip and isn't that cool?' But then each new game needed a custom chip and it became obvious to us, and other companies at the time, that cartridges with a ROM chip in would be the way to go. We started research on that in late 1975/early 1976, and Steve Mayer and Ron Milner did a spectacular job. Their Grass Valley group took it from idea to prototype in three months and then I put a team together here in the Valley and it took about six months to make a chip.

RG: As part of the deal Atari had with Magnavox over licensing *Pong*, weren't you supposed to share this sort of thing with it?

AA: Nolan had signed a deal with Magnavox a week before the CES in June 1976 that said we had to share any technology we had with them for the next 365 days. That meant we had to keep the VCS a secret and that was one of the hardest things we ever did. We could not keep secrets! That was one of the only times we managed it and it worked to our advantage because we turned up to the June '77 show with this product that blew everyone away. No one saw it coming. I mean, others like Fairchild had cartridge-based games, but this was by far and away the best. We took all the engineers along to share in that moment.

RG: This was around the time that Warner bought Atari. How did that affect things from your perspective?

AA: At first it was great – we had loads of money and could fly round in jets! The VCS did well the first year and okay the next but wasn't meeting targets. Nolan's and my solution was to design new products but Warner was a marketing house and they said, 'No we're going to advertise this.' And they were right. They marketed the snot out of it and it took off. But that wasn't interesting to me. Making lots of money is fun but it doesn't make you go to work every day. The consumer division had become kind of boring to me. Nolan had gone and the Warner guys that replaced him had no idea what to do and the process the management had put in to figure it out was [not very good]. I wanted a new challenge so went off to try to create a game using holography.

RG: Ah, you're talking about the Cosmos. How did you dream that up?

> “We'd work all day and night when we had to, but we still made time to party”

AA: You know I said we couldn't keep secrets? Well, instead we put out disinformation so our enemies couldn't tell which was real and which was bullshit. One of the big bullshit things we put out there was that we were going to use holography in a videogame. It seemed kind of weird and space age enough so that it might happen and it distracted them. Once Nolan was gone I thought, 'Hey I wonder if I really could make a game out of holography?'



» Atari had sold 100 or so machines already, but this was its very first advert for Pong, placed in Playmeter magazine in early 1973.

RG: So you believed your own bullshit?

AA: Yeah, exactly! It was a challenge. My attitude was: I don't want to do something if it's been done before. Where's the fun in that? I put together a neat team hidden away in engineering away from the corporate nonsense.

RG: Tell us about the Cosmos.

AA: Management had said, if you could make a videogame system with cartridges half the price of VCS ones, that would be great. They only have one chip, so I thought how can you cut cost? The answer: no chip! We put a very cheap, embossed hologram in there instead.

RG: Ingenious. Were the games any good?

AA: Well, not really, but it might have been interesting. The quality was like those little handheld baseball games you got back then, but played over these holographic images. We had an array of LEDs, about 8x9, controlled by a cheap microprocessor, and you had some buttons on the front panel. You put the cart in which had a 4x5-inch hologram and buttons on the cartridge that would tell the motherboard what game to play. All the games were stored in the ROM of the machine itself, not the cartridge. One of two light bulbs inside the base unit would light up in just the right spot to make this 3D image appear. So you'd be playing a space race game over a moon surface and if you crashed another image would appear with this wrecked spaceship.

RG: Sounds fascinating. Why did it never go into production?

AA: We took the prototype and *Space Boost* to CES in January 1980 and got orders for 250,000. I think it was that many; I may have been drunk. Warner wouldn't market it, though. The huge success of the VCS, which was making like a billion dollars a year, meant we could put a product out and if it failed it didn't matter financially… but, emotionally, they were so afraid to put something out that might fail and the bad publicity, they wouldn't release anything new. It's endemic to big companies. The success of their products stifles anything new.

RG: So that's why you left Atari?

AA: I walked away from millions of dollars. If I'd stayed there and shut up and looked pretty I would've made millions in bonuses but I couldn't stand it. That's a problem I have.

RG: But you didn't leave the games industry behind just yet, did you?

AA: I went off with Nolan and founded a company called Cumma. The problem in those days was there were billions of cartridges and a retailer didn't know what to put on the shelves, what will sell, and if he bought a bunch of games that didn't sell he was stuck with them. Nolan and I had this clever idea to make cartridges with static RAM so you could download a game onto them and when you were tired of it, you could put a new game on it. Way ahead of its time. We had a special unit that could make carts for the VCS, the Colecovision and any of the other machines out at the time. We got the thing introduced in 1983 and the market blew up – you couldn't give away a videogame. That party was over…

RG: Since the videogames crash in the mid-Eighties, you've worked at Apple, helping to invent the mpeg format and QuickTime, you've produced interactive toys at Zowie, created a media-rich slot machine for Las Vegas at Silicon Gaming and worked with lots of start-up companies. You seem to like things at the beginning, when they're still small.

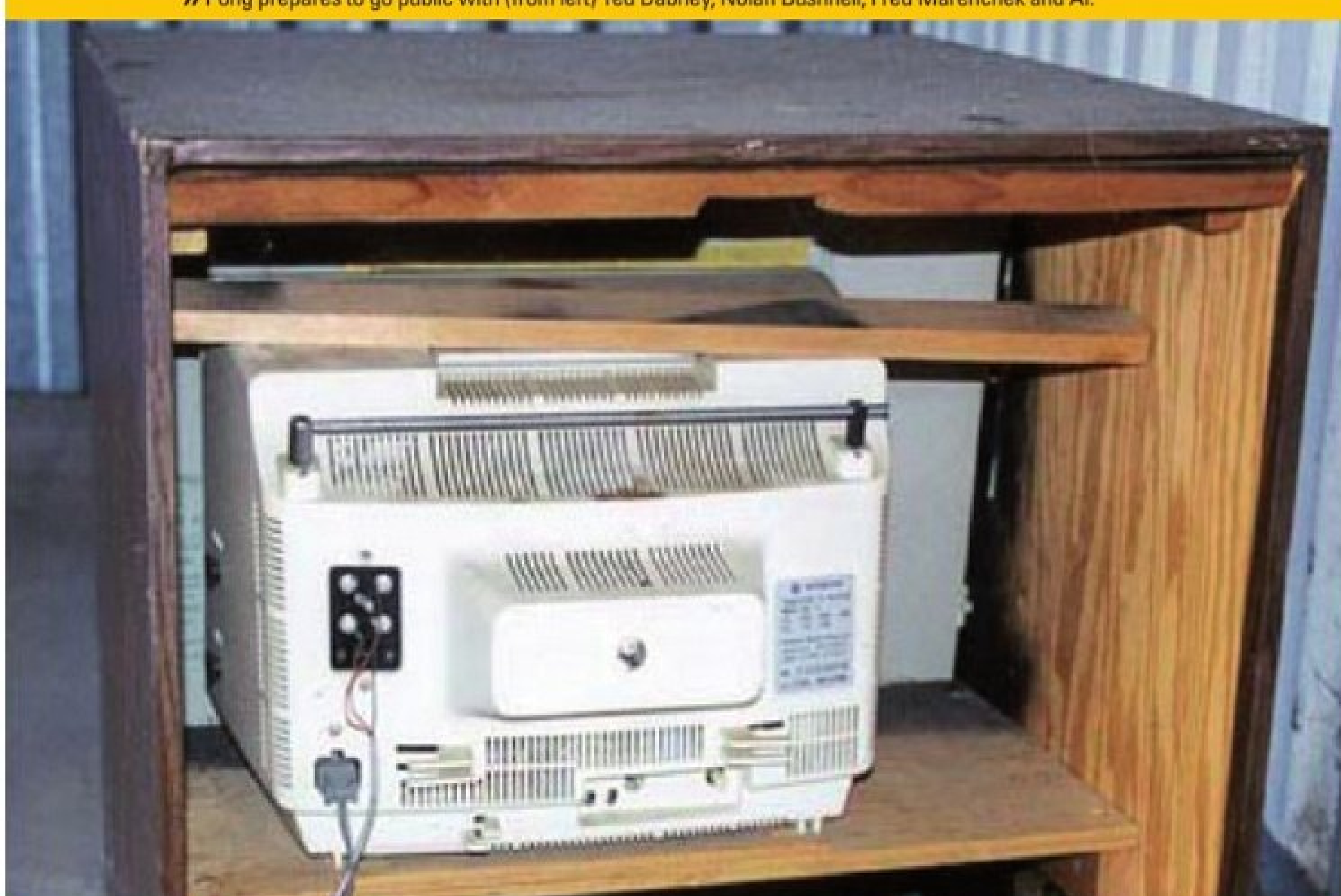
AA: I like puppies but I don't like dogs! [laughs] In the Valley, you can choose to work with big or small companies and I work better in a small environment. Plus, I like new challenges. I'm semi-retired now but I'm still working with three other old-timers on something in a new area for me and I just got back from a conference at Stanford on hot chips. I'm trying to keep current!

RG: Given you were right there at the start of the videogames industry and created the games that got Atari off the ground, do you ever feel your contribution is overlooked? Nolan does tend to get all the attention…

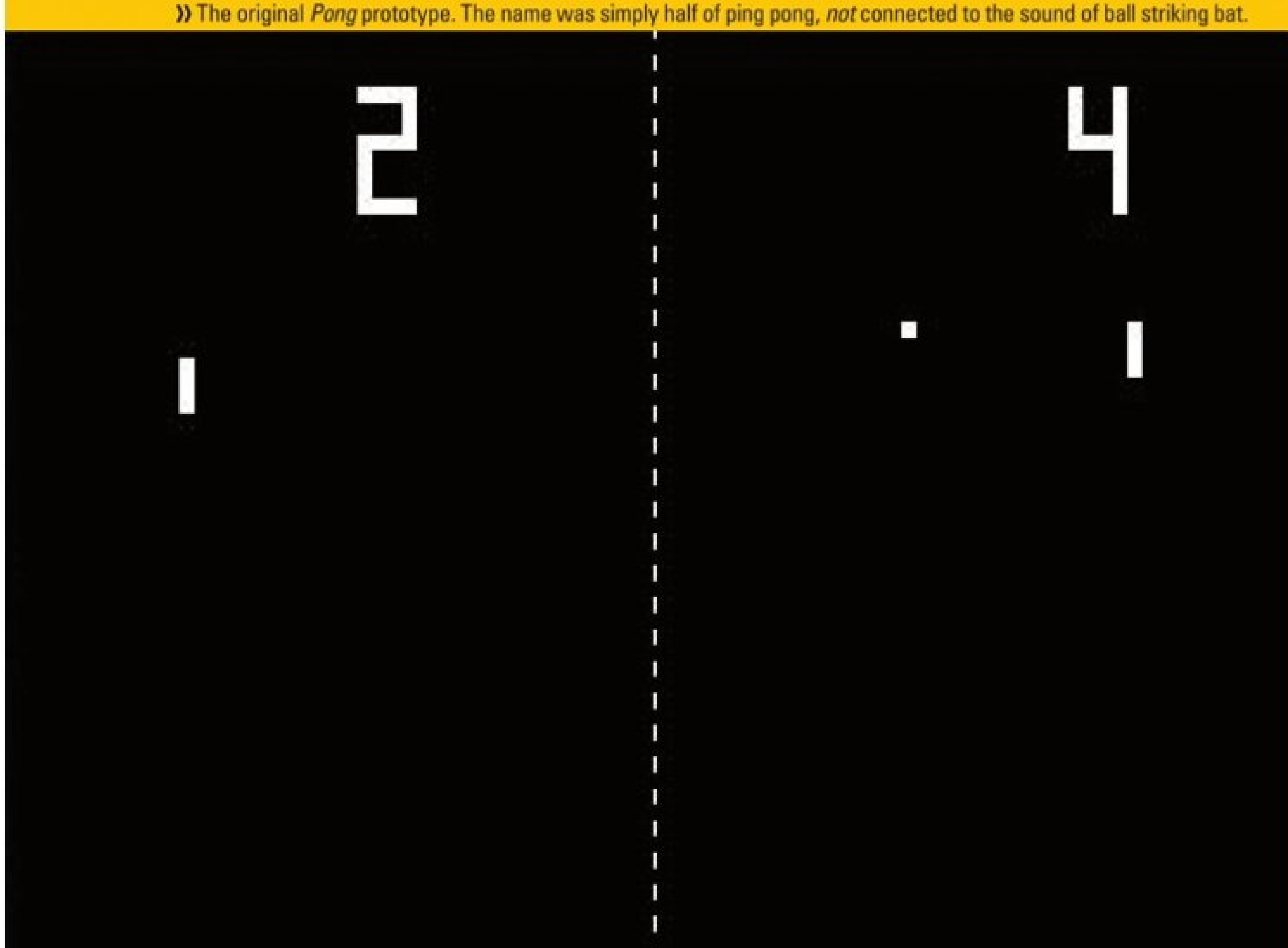
AA: Not at all. Nolan deserves all the credit. More than he already gets, in fact. You know I said I used to come home and tell my wife he's f***ing crazy, he wants to build a hundred machines a day? I never would have done any of it without him. Sure, I was the engineer, but frankly there were others that could have done the job – maybe better, maybe worse. I was crazy enough to go along with the gag. I was at the right place at the right time, at Berkeley and at Ampex, to have these things happen. And I got my rewards. Nolan and I are great friends and I get plenty of respect from people like yourself asking me questions. Most engineers work their whole life on stuff and are anonymous. I'm lucky enough to have done something that touched so many lives.



» Pong prepares to go public with (from left) Ted Dabney, Nolan Bushnell, Fred Marenchek and Al.



» The original *Pong* prototype. The name was simply half of ping pong, *not* connected to the sound of ball striking bat.



YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We were inundated with questions for Allan Alcorn. He managed to answer a good selection of them…

Did you work on any abandoned projects?
Apart from Cosmos, let me think… ah yes, Video Music! [laughs] Harold Lee, who was kind of a hippie, Hell's Angel type who rode Harleys and Bob Brown, who was the straightest guy who ever worked at Atari, had this idea to build a product that connected your TV set to your stereo. You'd put the set on and see this dazzling light show. We kept Harold away from the Sears guy, Tom Quinn, who wore a suit and was a real businessman. Atari was hard enough for them to take without showing them the crazies in the backroom, but once home *Pong* had been a success, we were a bit more relaxed and Harold and Bob thought they had a great idea. So we got this set up in the lab with a big TV, stereo blasting out Iron Butterfly and this light show going on.

Tom looks stunned and says, "This looks like the kind of thing hippies would sit around and smoke pot". Harold goes, "EXACTLY!" and pulls a joint out his pocket and offers it Tom. That kind of ended the discussion. We released the product at the Consumer Electronics Show in January 1977 and we didn't sell any! Ask any engineer from back then and they'll have a Video Music, boxed, in their closet.

Did you ever play someone at *Pong* who didn't know who you were?
I was just at California Extreme and this ten-year-old was playing an original machine by himself. So I went over and said, I'll play it with you. I beat him, beat him real good and I said, 'You know, I used to be the best *Pong* player in the whole world.' He looked at me like I was crazy. He didn't know I designed it and was the only player for a while.

Did you create the paddle controller for *Pong*?
Yeah it was just a simple potentiometer. I bought a cheap one for the prototype and after we'd had the problem with the coin box filling up, the next thing that went was the potentiometer, within a few weeks. I thought this was crazy, then I did the math; for every quarter the machine took, you turn that knob 20 or 30 times. Multiply that out, this thing was getting tens of thousands of turns per week. I wound up having to buy a very expensive premier potentiometer from a military contractor so it would last.





» The original August 1973 memo from Nolan Bushnell to Al, including the request for a 20-player Gotcha set-up and a home Pong console

What do you think of Nintendo's new hardware?
I like all the stuff Nintendo have been doing, with the Wii and the motion controllers and the 3DS. Yeah, it did make me think of the Cosmos and I smiled! It's great to see that creativity and risk taking. I've just learned about the new chipset for the Microsoft games machines. You know what it does? Exactly the same as the previous one but cheaper. Not one f***ing new idea. Come on guys…

Thanks to Marty Goldberg for his help with this article



» [Spectrum] *Alien 8*



» [Spectrum] *Atic Atac*

» RETROREVIVAL

Ultimate Play The Game: The Collected Works



LIKE THIS WAS EVER GOING TO BE POOR VALUE



» SPECTRUM
» ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
» 1988

If you were a Spectrum owner, odds are you had quite a few Ultimate Play The Game games. After all, the Stamper brothers produced some of the most technically proficient games around and they played brilliantly as well. From the moment *Jetpac* was released in 1982 the brothers set a standard for Spectrum games that few other companies could consistently match.

It was a high standard that would last throughout the Eighties – until the company was sold to US Gold – and in that time the brothers notched up hit after hit, defined isometric gaming with the release of *Knight Lore* and introduced the world to *Sabre Man*.

If you still have access to a Spectrum or are just interested in learning what made the company so special then we heartily recommend that you seek out a copy of this truly phenomenal compilation, as it represents the pinnacle of Ultimate's work, even if it doesn't feature every one of its games.

It's an impressive list though, as 11 games have been included, and they're all cracking titles. *Psst*, *Cookie*, *Atic Atac* and *Trans Am* could be found on side A of tape 1, while *Jetpac* and its sequel *Lunar Jetman* were on side B. Tape 2 contained the amazing *Sabre Wulf*, the excellent *Knight* Lore and the underrated *Alien 8*, while the isometric madness continued on side B with *Nightshade* and *Gunfright*.

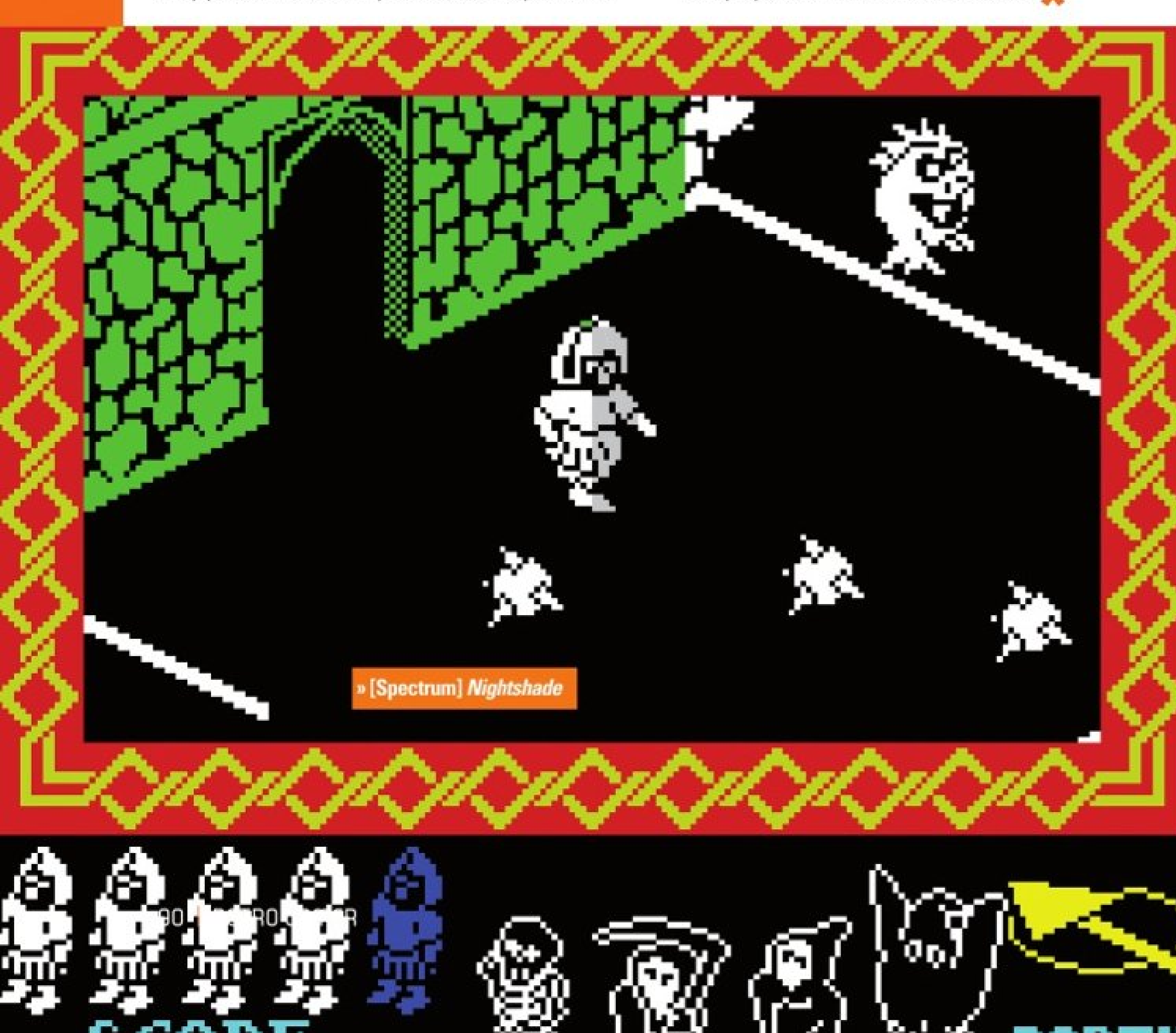
The games missing are *Cyberun*, *Bubbler*, *Martianoids*, *Pentagram* and *Underwurlde*. We're not too fussed about *Bubbler* or *Martianoids*, but it's nevertheless a shame that these five titles are missing from the package.

It's a small quibble, however, because this is a truly staggering compilation, acting not only as an introduction to some of the Spectrum's best games, but also showing the evolution of one of the machine's most respected developers.

It goes for a high price on the times that it does appear on eBay, but buy it anyway. It's an essential compilation that deserves to be in every Spectrum owner's collection. *



» [Spectrum] *Jetpac*



» [Spectrum] *Nightshade*



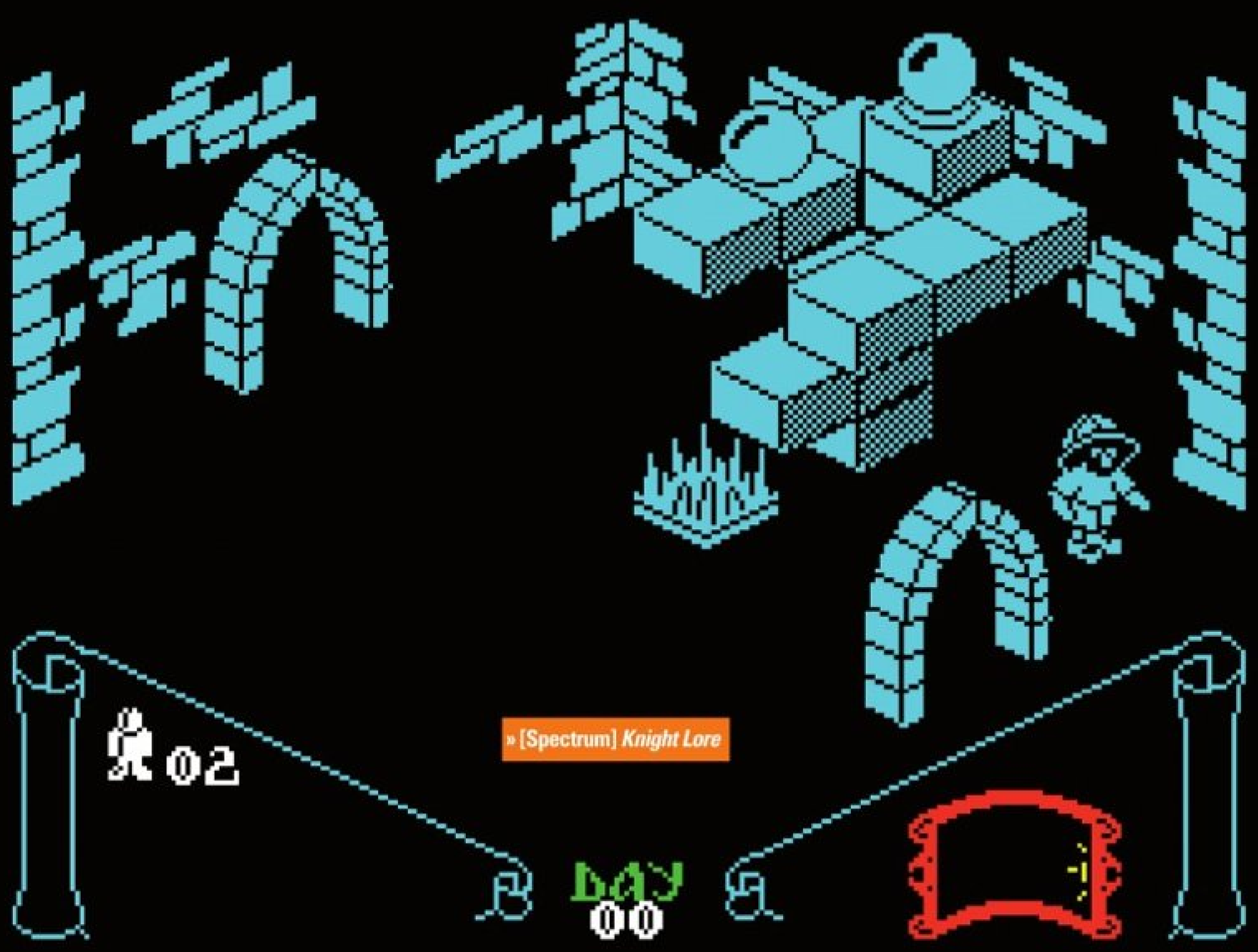
» [Spectrum] *Psst!*



» [Spectrum] *Cookie*



» [Spectrum] *Gun Fright*



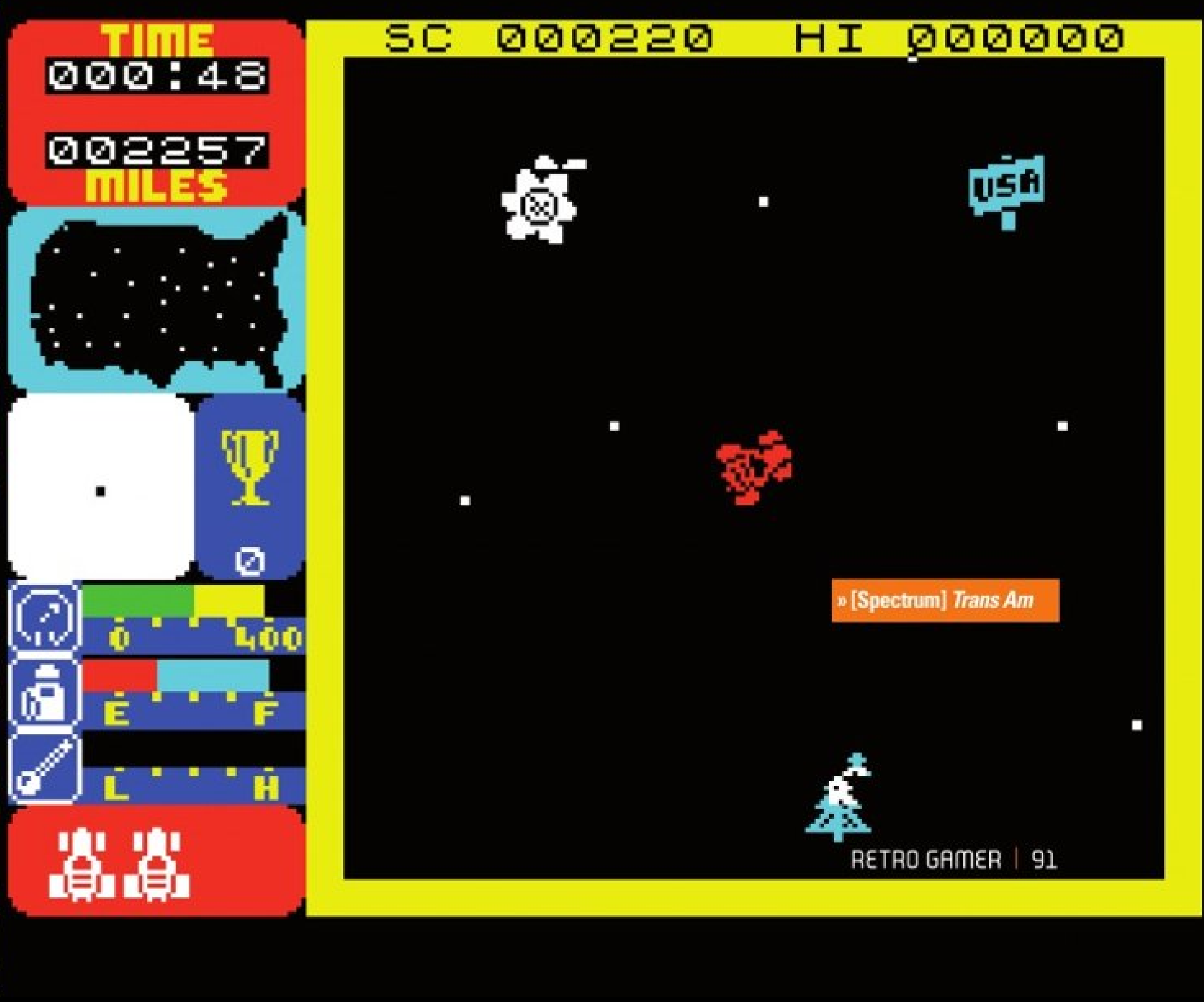
» [Spectrum] *Knight Lore*



» [Spectrum] *Lunar Jetman*



» [Spectrum] *Sabre Wulf*



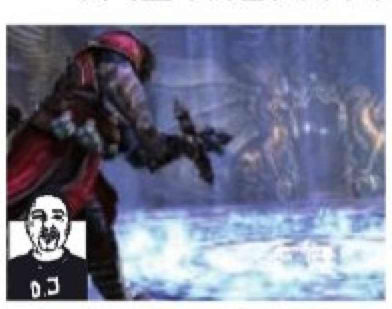
» [Spectrum] *Trans Am*

RETRORATED

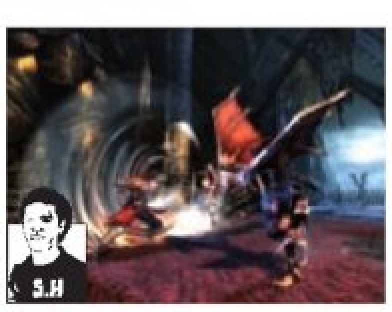


>> Finally, after months of nervous waiting, we've finally got our mitts on Konami's new Castlevania game, and it's absolutely stunning. Other interesting treats this month include the long-awaited return of Sonic The Hedgehog, a surprisingly fun Batman game, and Sid Meier's Pirates! Arrrr!

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow
It's a great reboot, looks beautiful, and is packed full of hidden secrets.



STUART
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow
I was looking forward to this and I haven't been disappointed. A fantastic and overdue update.



DAVID
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow
Proof that 3D *Castlevania* games don't have to be poor. A cracking update to the series.

>> CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW

PS3



MERCURYSTEAM RESURRECTS CASTLEVANIA… AND IT WORKS

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £49.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** MERCURYSTEAM
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» The first *Castlevania* game was released in 1986. Since then it has grown into one of Konami's most successful franchises and appeared on a variety of home systems. Many recent titles have been based on the gameplay found in 1997's *Symphony Of The Night*.

✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV (SNES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
GOD OF WAR III (PS3)



Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow

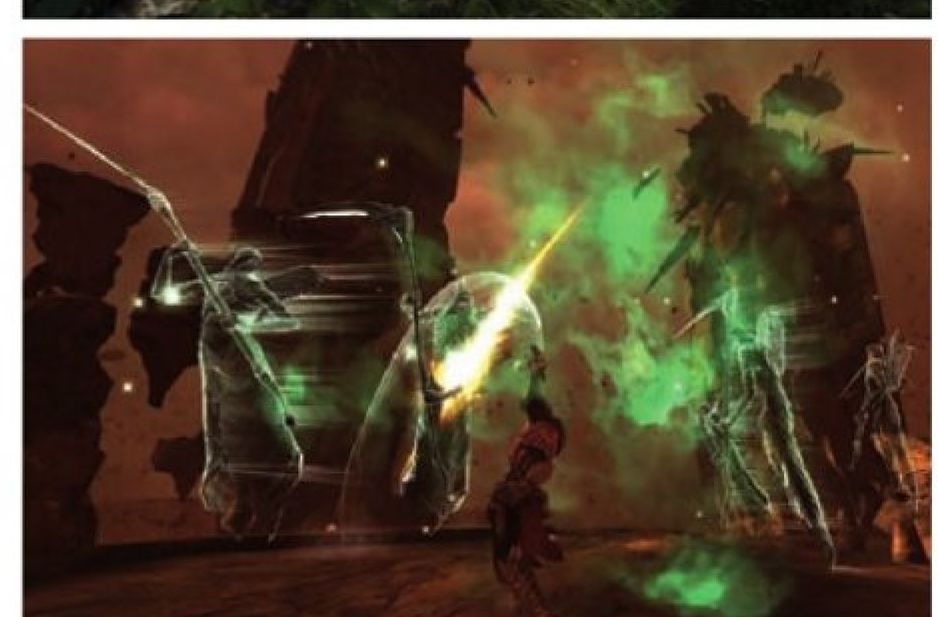


We had concerns about *Lords Of Shadow*, but they're with good cause. After all, previous 3D *Castlevania* games have been average at best, while MercurySteam's last game, *Jericho*, had very little going for it. We're delighted to say, then, that not only is *Lords Of Shadow* a cracking way to reboot the franchise, but it's also the best adventure of the year.

First the bad news, though. If you're expecting a *Castlevania* in the vein of *Symphony Of The Night*, then prepare for disappointment. This isn't a 3D restructuring of the Metroidvania games that have been repeatedly churned out over the past 13 years, but is instead a return to the *Castlevania* of old. You know, when the series was just a balls-out platform adventure and nothing else. In fact, *Lords Of Shadow* reminds us most of *Super Castlevania IV*, in terms of its structure, locations and general aesthetics.

It also borrows heavily from other recent games, including *God Of War*, *Uncharted* and *Shadow Of The Colossus*. There are no original ideas here, and yet it still feels new, and, most importantly, like a proper





» [PS3] Combat in *Lords Of Shadow* is fast and furious, allowing you to unlock more moves as you gain experience.



» [PS3] The scale in *Castlevania* is fantastic. Needless to say, you'll be using your whip a lot.

Castlevania game. This series has always been about a lone hero traversing gothic locations and battling mythical monsters to a rousing orchestral score. *Lords Of Shadow* has all this and more.

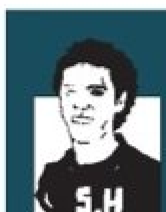
It's a stunningly beautiful game. In fact, we'll go as far as to say that it's one of the most gorgeous games of this generation. Locations are filled with intricate touches that breathe life into them. Frogs hop lazily across paths and birds flitter around without a care in the world; it feels like a living world and only gets more impressive once you've reached the castle and get to explore its grounds. Equally impressive is the soundtrack, which is as good as anything in past games.

Castlevania has always been about exploring, and *Lords Of Shadow* is no different. While most levels are rather short and linear, later ones definitely open up, providing many paths that can be explored. It's worth visiting out-of-the-way locations as well, as there are plenty of hidden treats to discover, and in true Metroidvania style, certain ones can only be acquired when you've located a specific item.

Combat is also resoundingly solid, falling somewhere between the simple mashing of *God Of War* and the intricate complexity of *Bayonetta*. Admittedly the camera occasionally fails to catch up with all the on-screen action, but the fighting itself is exciting and energetic, and particularly sparkles whenever you encounter *Lords Of Shadow*'s many bosses. Additional touches like the ability to use light and shadow magic – one heals you when used, the other makes your attacks stronger – and new combos ensure that the fighting never gets stale and, married to those epic bosses, gives a scale and scope that previous 3D outings just couldn't match.

Add in phenomenal presentation, a great voice cast and clever challenges that extend *Lords Of Shadow* way past its initial playtime, and you have a *Castlevania* game of truly staggering proportions. There are niggles – the occasional wonky camera, the odd bit of dire dialogue and the fact that it rips so heavily from other ideas – but there's no denying that the end product is the reboot that the series so desperately needed.

OPINION



We suspect some fans will be taken aback by *Lords Of Shadow*'s linearity but still be won over. It looks astonishing, the combat feels solid, and the game, as a whole, is suitably epic. The best 3D *Castlevania* game by a country mile.

Stuart Hunt

In a Nutshell

Finally, a 3D adventure that truly does the *Castlevania* name justice. Fans of the Metroidvania style of gameplay will be upset, but this remains a staggeringly good adventure game and a great change of direction for the classic franchise. More, please.

>> Scores

Presentation	96%
Graphics	98%
Sound	92%
Playability	92%
Addictivity	91%

Overall 93%

✱ VIRTUAL ROUND-UP

>> There's no better medium to find all your favourite retro games than the various download services. Here are this month's new additions

▾ VIRTUAL CONSOLE

It's a pretty dire month for the VC with only two titles making an appearance. *Rival Turf* is an incredibly average scrolling fighter from Jaleco – although Stu really likes it – while *Final Fantasy: Mystic Quest* is an enjoyable spin on the typical Japanese RPG. Both titles are available for the SNES. Here's hoping that the recent announcement of VC games for the 3DS means that Nintendo will buck up its current plans.

Rival Turf
» **System:** SNES
» **Points:** 800 (£6.50)
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Final Fantasy: Mystic Quest
» **System:** SNES
» **Points:** 800 (£6.50)
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

▾ PC

We've had numerous readers asking us to cover PC releases from Good Old Games and Steam, so here it is for you. Ironically, despite the fact that its recent publicity stunt was PR at its cringe-worthy worst, there are some damn good games available on GOG.

Age Of Wonders
» **System:** GOG
» **Price:** $5.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆



Baldur's Gate: The Original Saga
» **System:** GOG
» **Price:** $9.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» The first of seven *D&D* games that GOG has secured, and it's a good one. Set in the Forgotten Realms and featuring plenty of impressive gameplay, it's an epic adventure that's worth revisiting. It also comes with lots of additional extras, including a soundtrack, maps and various bits of art.



Planescape: Torment
» **System:** GOG
» **Price:** $9.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» *Planescape* is quite simply one of the greatest RPGs of all time, and even if you can't tell your dungeons from your dragons you need to play this magnificent game. Thanks to its diverse characters and epic storytelling it remains a staggering adventure and is a bargain at its current price point.

Icewind Dale
» **System:** GOG
» **Price:** $9.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

▾ PLAYSTATION NETWORK

No new games from Sony this month, which is a tad frustrating when you consider what's available stateside and in Japan. Where are *Resident Evil, Silent Hill, Suikoden, R-Type Delta, Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* and *R-Types*? We know where they're not, at least. On the UK store!

▾ GAME ROOM

More disappointment from Krome as it continues to squander one of the greatest digital distribution concepts around. Based on its Facebook page, we're not the only disappointed gamers, and its recent announcement of creating bundles of existing games seems like yet another nail in the Game Room coffin.

✱ All games are 240 Points

Body Slam! Super Pro Wrestling
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Bowling
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Deep Pocket Billiards
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Flak Attack
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

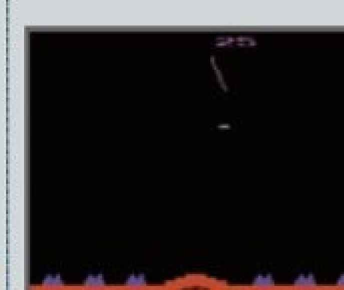
Galactic Warriors
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Horse Racing
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Hyper Crash
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Kitten Kaboodle
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Konami GT
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆



Missile Command
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆
» **More** pointless conversions from Krome as it seems intent on releasing every Atari 2600 game in Microsoft's homage to the arcades of old. When will it end?

Plaque Attack
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Pressure Cooker
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Private Eye
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Radar Lock
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Sharp Shot
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Street Racer
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Submarine Commander
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

RETRORATED

>> BATMAN: THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD





» [DS] Most of the boss battles are decent. Here, Catwoman is riding a big cat.

OPINION

While undeniably aimed at kids, this new scrolling fighter definitely has old-school appeal. The visuals feel reminiscent of the 16-bit era, while Batman and his pals have a variety of silly, over-the-top moves. If you love your scrolling fighters then give it a try.

Darran Jones

Batman: The Brave And The Bold

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** WII » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PUBLISHER:** WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT » **DEVELOPER:** WAYFORWARD » **PLAYERS:** 1

We've been impressed with WayForward's Nintendo output of late. We awarded *Contra 4* a whopping 92% back in issue 64, and more recently we fell in love with its reimagining of David Crane's classic *A Boy And His Blob*.

While *The Brave And The Bold* never quite reaches either of those games' levels of brilliance, it's still a decent side-scrolling action title for the handheld that once again proves that the able developer knows how to deliver good gameplay.

Taking the underpinning theme of the animated series it's based on, *The Brave And The Bold* partners up Batman with some of DC's more obscure super faces like Black Beetle (exactly), and sees Bats battling through some nicely designed stages alongside a hero companion and players switching between them on the fly to get around.

At around three hours the main game is sweet but certainly short, and quite easy too. And while its length is bolstered a smidgeon with the inclusion of some unlockable battle mini-games, things that resemble capsule toys to find throughout the game and the ability to purchase and unlock new abilities for Batman, at almost £30 for a few hours core gameplay, no matter how good it is, still makes it a struggle to really recommend.

>> Scores

Presentation	83%
Graphics	80%
Sound	73%
Playability	50%
Addictivity	60%

Overall 69%



Alien Breed 2: Assault

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (£6.80) » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **And still Team** 17 fails to recapture the brilliance of *Alien Breed: Tower Assault*. Never mind, though, as once you get past the initial disappointment you'll discover that *Alien Breed 2: Assault* is a perfectly fun game, featuring a decent power-up system, plenty of meaty bosses and some truly stunning visuals. The gameplay still feels rather weak and more could be made of the multiplayer mode, but this remains a solid little shooter that fans will certainly enjoy.

>> Score **73%**

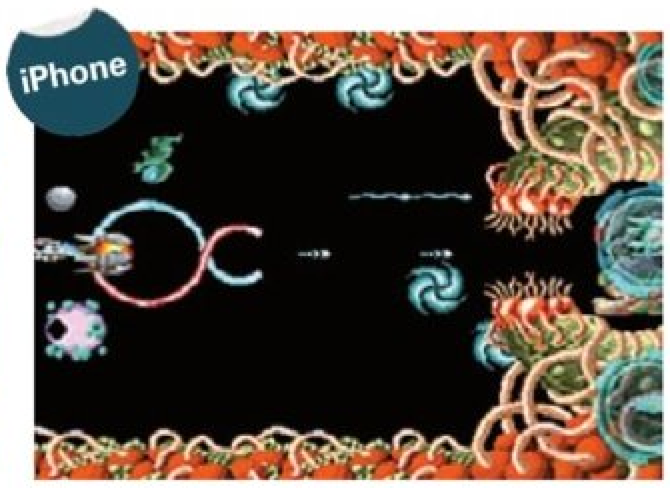


Sid Meier's Pirates!

» **SYSTEM:** WII
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **Well this is** rather disappointing. We thoroughly enjoyed playing through the Xbox and PSP versions of Sid Meier's classic strategy game, but this port is nowhere near the high standard of those great earlier ports. The new motion controls feel poorly implemented and tacked on with very little thought, while the new two-player co-op mode is extremely weak. Ultimately, though, it just lacks the charm of earlier *Pirates!* games. It's still *Pirates!* and it still has little swishes of excellence, but this is a rather average version.

>> Score **58%**

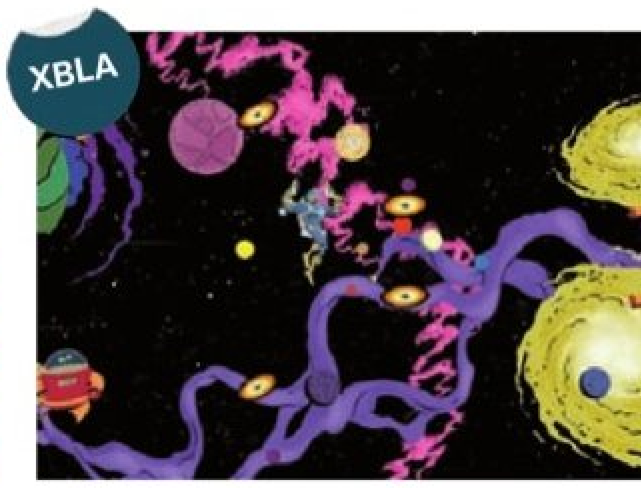


R-Type

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £0.59 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Here's further proof** that it's just not worth getting your hopes up over iPhone ports of most classic games. Despite a number of different control methods (including a virtual D-pad and accelerometer controls) this fails to capture the excitement of the original arcade blaster, which is a shame as it certainly looks the part with nigh on arcade-perfect visuals. The price is cheap, but all this will do is destroy your memories of the original game. Steer well clear and save your cash for a decent iPhone shooter instead.

>> Score **46%**



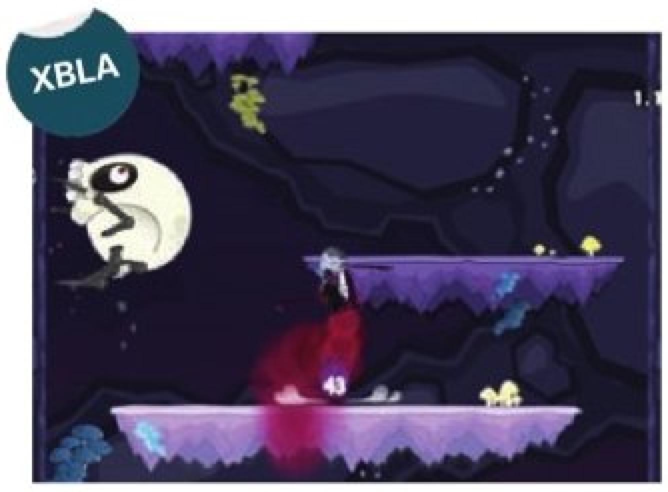
Comic Jumper: Captain Smiley

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 1200 POINTS (£10.60) » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Utterly nutty game** that gleefully takes the mickey out of both the comic and platform genres. While the gameplay can get repetitive, the funny dialogue, insanely colourful visuals and decent gameplay mechanics certainly add to the charm and it's yet another game to add to the twin-stick shooter genre that XBLA loves so much. The 1200 Points asking price certainly feels steep, but this remains a great addition to XBLA. Just don't expect the fun to last forever.

>> Score **80%**

XBLA



Monsters Probably Stole My Princess

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE INDIE GAMES
» **PRICE:** 240 POINTS (£1.80) » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Destroy monsters by** chasing them up a continually scrolling screen and hitting them three times before they escape. The key to *Monsters Probably Stole My Princess*, though, is that if you step onto a platform you've already previously jumped on you'll reset your score multiplier, which greatly affects your overall score. Yes it's ridiculously simple, but its charming visuals and "just one more go" gameplay will have you constantly returning to it.

>> Score **86%**

PSP



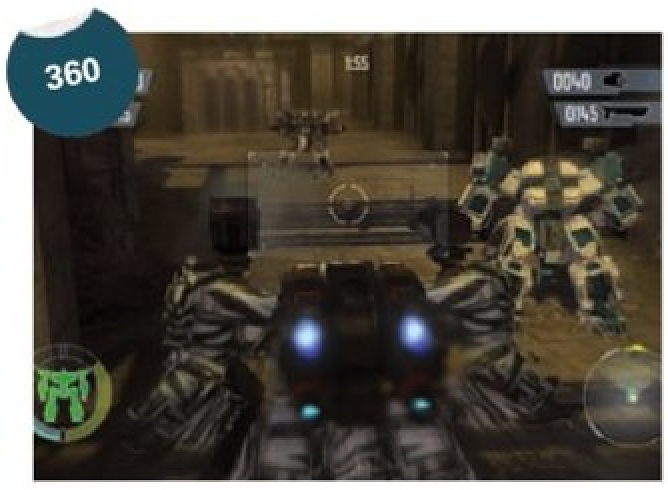
Phantasy Star Portable 2

» **SYSTEM:** PSP
» **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> **Sega's sequel is** admittedly more of the same, but when it isn't broke there's no real need to fix it. The biggest inclusion to return to Sega's franchise is the ability to finally play online, which greatly adds to the game's appeal and recaptures the fun of the earlier Dreamcast game. The new harder difficulty is also a nice touch, especially as enemy AI has been greatly improved. A worthy update that all fans of the franchise will adore.

>> Score **84%**

360



Front Mission Evolved

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
» **PRICE:** £44.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-8

>> **Kudos to Double** Helix Games for trying to take Square's classic Japanese RPG in a fresh direction, but this is most unwanted. The deep strategy of the SNES and PlayStation games has been replaced with simplistic third-person blasting, and while it's initially fun for the first few levels it soon becomes extremely dull to play. It also pays very little attention to canon, meaning this just isn't worthy of the *Front Mission* name. Pity.

>> Score **56%**

PC



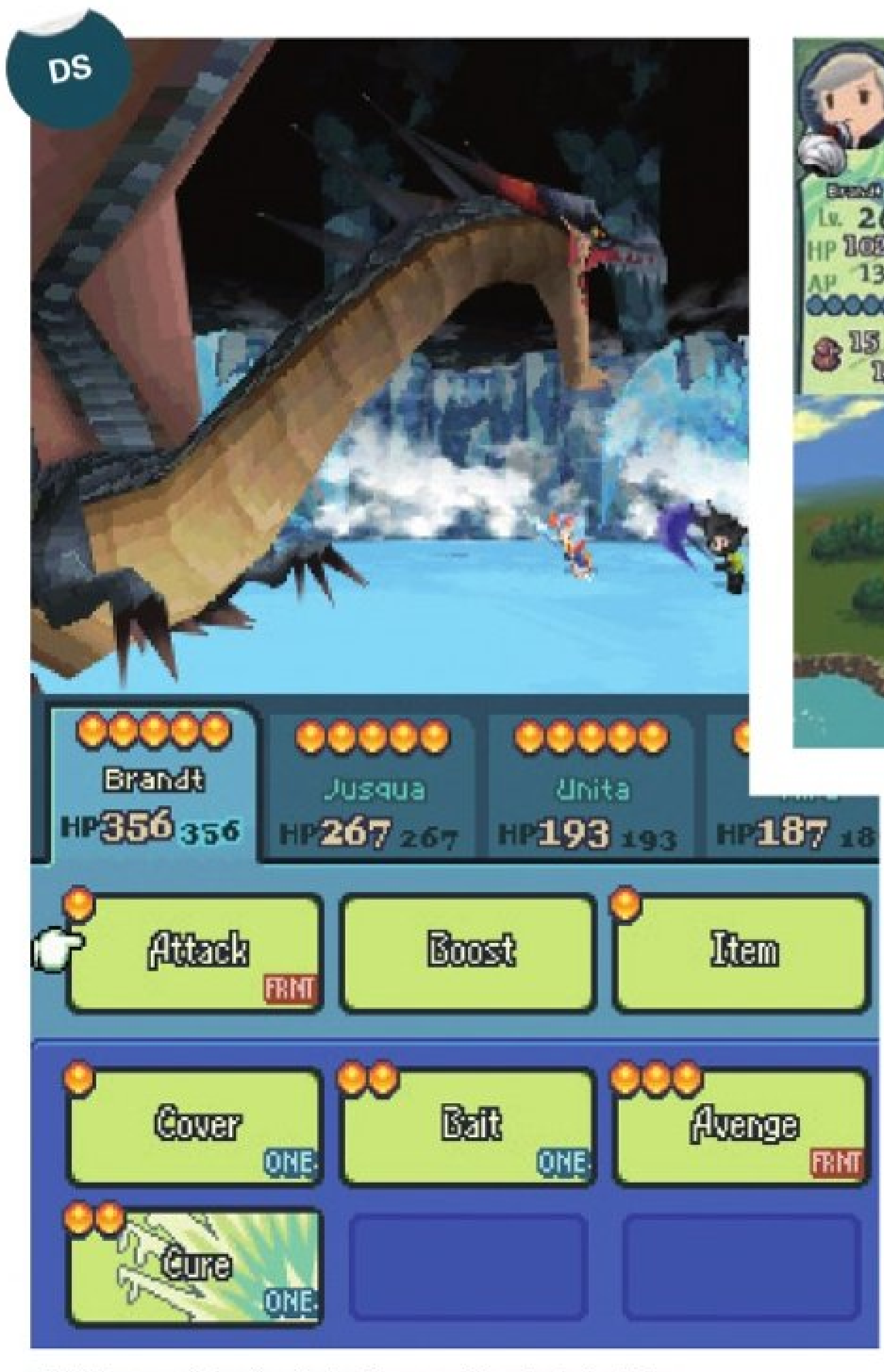
Mega Drive Classic Collection Vol 1

» **SYSTEM:** PC
» **PRICE:** £14.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **In its infinite** wisdom, Sega has decided to release some of its most popular Mega Drive games over four discs instead of delivering a bargain disc packed full of classic games. It's a strange decision, because aside from the threadbare presentation and meagre selection of games this has potential, mainly due to some very good emulation. Our advice? Wait until next year when they're all released and buy them on the cheap.

>> Score **60%**

DS



» [DS] Bosses will require plenty of teamwork in order to best them.



Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes Of Light

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £24.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE ENIX » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE/MATRIX SOFTWARE » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



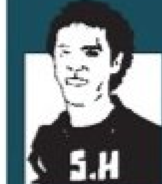
While this is brand new IP for the *Final Fantasy* brand, *The 4 Heroes Of Light* feels resoundingly old-school in its approach. Indeed, in many ways it feels almost like a SNES RPG due to its simple mechanics, charming storyline and robust combat system.

The plot is nothing to write home about – a boy is summoned to a castle on his 14th birthday to rescue a princess and subsequently the world – but it's told with such charm and affection that it's hard to not fall in love with it.

Clichés abound at every turn with the plot sticking to all the traditional elements of a typical Japanese RPG, and yet somehow it all works. It's also surprisingly tough, mainly due to the inventory system, which, unlike other *Final Fantasy* RPGs, allows you to carry no more than 15 items. When you consider this restriction also includes weapon and armour, you have to really think about every item you pick up.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of *The 4 Heroes Of Light* is just how gorgeous it looks. The visuals are reminiscent of a child's book and it adds immeasurably to the 16-bit stylings that the game is heavily based on. A challenging RPG that feels old-school in both its design and execution.

OPINION



Be careful with Square's new game, for beneath the stunning visuals lies an amazingly tough game. Very reminiscent of the old SNES *FFs*, it's a surprisingly enjoyable adventure that feels like you've been transported back to the mid-Nineties.

Stuart Hunt

>> Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	94%
Sound	78%
Playability	84%
Addictivity	80%

Overall 81%

PSN



» [PS3] Look! It's like playing *Sonic 2* all over again!

GO DEEPER

The facts behind Sonic The Hedgehog 4

>> The four zones can be played in any order, even before you've completed them.

>> Avoid the iPhone version as it's let down by its stuttering and poor unresponsive controls.

>> This is considered a direct sequel to *Sonic & Knuckles*.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 (MEGA DRIVE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
NEW SUPER MARIO BROS WII (Wii)





HOW LONG HAVE WE BEEN TELLING SEGA TO MAKE THIS?

Sonic The Hedgehog 4



Now this is more like it. After being less than impressed with more recent 3D outings, Sega goes back to basics and delivers a genuinely entertaining *Sonic* game.

Make no mistake, while *Sonic 4* has niggles, this is by far the closest we've seen Sega get to his 16-bit roots for some time. Indeed, in many respects *Sonic The Hedgehog 4* feels more like a remix of past glories, rather than a brand new game, because so much of what's on offer seems so familiar. Everything from level design to actual boss battles with Dr Robotnik has been lifted from past games and given a fresh coat of digital paint. The end result is an extremely slick *Sonic* that, for the most part, pushes all the right buttons.

Graphically it's gorgeous, with bright, cheerful-looking levels that easily recapture the essence of the original Mega Drive zones. It's also pleasingly fast – not *Rush* fast, but fast enough that you get a genuine feeling of exhilaration as you tear through the impossibly colourful stages. Audio is just as good, with cheerful, zippy songs that could have easily emitted from your TV speakers back in 1991. Add in all the familiar spot effects from the original games – even the 'Se-ga' announcement is emulated as it loads up – and the end result is a very authentic *Sonic* experience.

While the aesthetics are extremely good, certain gameplay elements do tend to frustrate. The biggest issue is with Sonic himself. While we're still not happy with the way he runs, we're more concerned with the strange physics that can sometimes take a hold of him. His inertia is nowhere near as good as in earlier games, making him feel incredibly sluggish when you're simply walking around or having to make timed jumps. It's not game-breaking, but something about his movement just doesn't feel right. It's a pain, as level design for the most part is very strong, with many levels having multiple routes through them and well thought out checkpoints, which give the game a nice *Sonic 2* vibe. Less impressive are the few sections that require precise timing to get through, which become very frustrating due to Sonic's new sluggishness. It's not a game-breaker, however, and the end result is still the best side-on *Sonic* we've played since the originals.

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PSN
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE, WIIWARE, IPHONE
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £9.99
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** SONIC TEAM/DIMPS
- **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Sonic The Hedgehog* was released in 1991 and became a huge success for both the Mega Drive and Sega. Since then he's gone on to appear in countless sequels and spin-offs, with his 3D outings rarely living up to the magic of the original games.

OPINION



I hated *Sonic 4* at first. The CG graphics and stodgy controls really put me off. But things soon get much better thanks to some inventive level design and genuinely new ideas. Overall, this is solid stuff, but I'm looking forward to further improvements in *Episode II*.

Ashley Day

In a nutshell

While certain elements let it down, this remains a great platformer that recaptures the feeling of the early 2D games. It's not as new a game as we were expecting, but it still feels like good old *Sonic*.

>> Scores

Presentation	84%
Graphics	86%
Sound	89%
Playability	80%
Addictivity	76%
Overall	**80%**

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



So *VVVVVV* is being converted to the C64 – that makes sense. The graphics and indeed colours are based on the breadbin, so converting them over should be trivial. But that does beg a question: what other titles could be converted to the 8-bits? Come to think of it, what happened to the cool-looking versions of *Geometry Wars* that were being discussed for the NES and Vectrex?

» [Amstrad CPC] He's either dead or very sleepy.



ORION PRIME

BUT IS IT A PRIME COMPUTER?



» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC
» **DEVELOPED BY:** ARKOS AND LES SUCRES EN MORCEAUX
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/ORION
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2010
» **PRICE:** FREE

Sulphide IV is apparently a gaseous derivative of hydrogen sulphide that is a highly explosive powerful hallucinogen capable of suppressing human vital signs enough to make long-term deep-space travel viable – presumably it's best to avoid using all of those properties simultaneously unless you want a really memorable party.

Since the only supply of Sulphide IV is to be found on a distant planet called Deys and there's currently a war in the space between there and Earth, only the most courageous (or perhaps that should be suicidal?) pilots dare to use the trade routes passing through the battle zone. Being one of that small number means that our hero has been raking in the pennies by saving on shipping costs.

But after over 150 flawless runs, he finally hits some bad luck and the ship comes out of warp drive bang in the middle of a dense asteroid field – 'bang' being the operative word. Stranded in the wilderness of space aboard a damaged escape pod that's haemorrhaging fuel and with no sign of help on the scanners, the protagonist stumbles across the research vessel Orion Prime – although this sanctuary doesn't appear to be in the best of conditions either. It isn't answering distress signals or requests to dock, and doesn't even appear to be transmitting a locator signal.

Orion Prime is a point-and-click adventure that plays a hand of atmospheric cards to excellent effect – the usually bright Amstrad CPC palette has been persuaded to produce some surprisingly dingy and claustrophobic locations while a range of dramatic background music stirs up the tension. Even wandering around the apparently abandoned control rooms and living quarters in search of the missing crew becomes quite unnerving. There's a considerable amount of text, well-written location, event and object descriptions all hint at foreboding things behind every corner while simultaneously being judiciously sprinkled with a dark humour that raises a smile without ruining the atmosphere – there are also discarded handhelds containing personal logs and messages offering clues to the various puzzles or hinting at what happened about the Orion Prime.

There are a few little niggles: the graphics have been converted and, while an impressive job has been done, making out details can sometimes prove tricky. There are a few places where 'pixel searching' – dragging the cursor over the entire screen and watching the window that lists the names of objects that can be interacted with – is required, because it's frustratingly easy to miss small but important items that have a small surface area. But that aside, *Orion Prime* is a major work for the Amstrad CPC that sprawls over one 3.5-inch or three 3-inch disks and is remarkably quick at loading data. This style of point-and-click adventure really isn't common in 8-bit homebrew circles and a lot of time and effort have obviously been put into this one – the developer should be commended.

92%



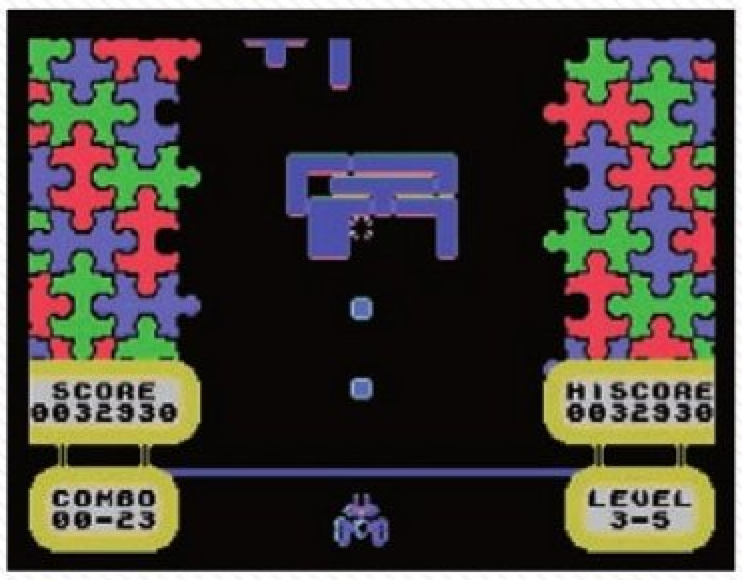
» [Amstrad CPC] Sanctuary!

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

QBIQS

» **FORMAT:** MSX » **DEVELOPER:** Z80ST SOFTWARE » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/QBIQS » **PRICE:** FREE



» [MSX] Building a bridge to your heart.

At first glance, *Qbiqs* might appear to be a variation on *Tetris*, but the similarities are only visual, as the main inspiration is Konami's *Quarth*. As *Tetris*-style blocks fall from the top of the screen, the player's ship must shoot single blocks up to convert them into solid squares and rectangles. Scoring is based on how many blocks make up an object when it's eliminated, so players can either aim to survive by disposing of everything as quickly as possible or risk using more blocks than is strictly necessary for extra points.

There are relatively few clones of *Quarth*, and even fewer good ones, so it's great to see a decent rendition for the MSX. All of the graphics are colourful and clear, in-game music has been executed well and the action doesn't take long to become manic – there are even options to skip previously completed levels and a two-player mode for duking it out with a friend.

91%

MORPH

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** JOONAS LINDBERG
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MORPH » **PRICE:** FREE

Sadly, there's not a single Plasticine person to be found in *Morph* for the C64 – instead it's all about a smiley face pushing coloured spheres into groups of two or three. Once this happens, the spheres disappear and the level is complete when all of them are gone. After that quirk, the general rules of *Sokoban* apply, so the puzzles revolve around getting those groups made without leaving anything stuck against a wall.

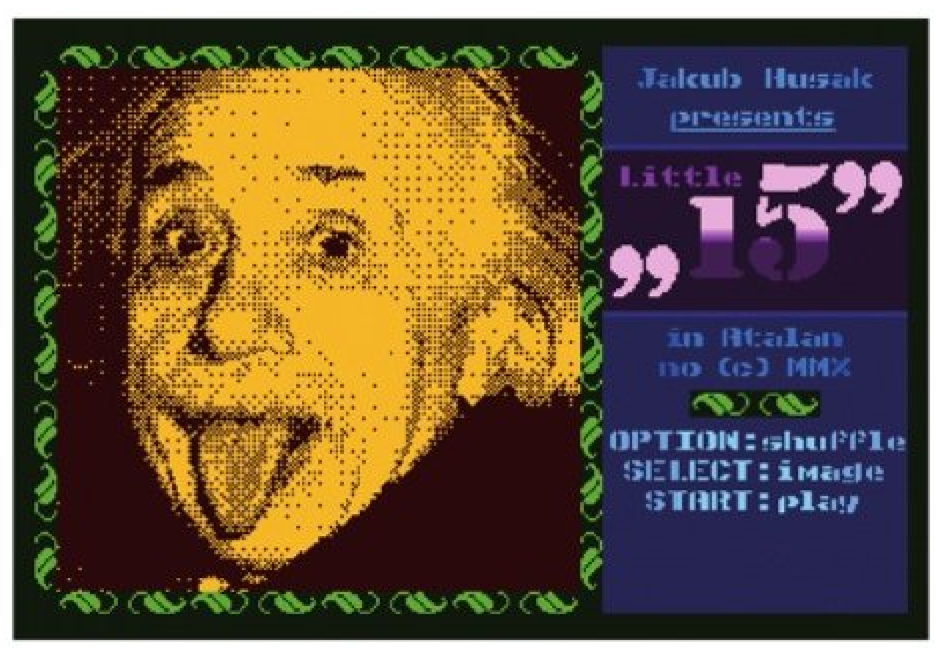
The graphics and in particular sound are rather sparse in *Morph* and a grand total of three spot effects accompany the slightly bizarrely coloured screens – not a deal breaker for a puzzle game, but still a little off-putting.

If there's a serious criticism we could aim at *Morph* it would be about the inconsistencies in the difficulty; the 30 levels can be puzzled out, but the order they're presented in seems a little muddled, with stumpers book-ended by screens that feel far easier. Those curve balls will lead to some players storming away from the computer in frustration.

81%

» [C64] Wot no Chas?





» [Atari 8-bit] PpppHhhpppt!



LITTLE 15

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** JAKUB HUSAK
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/LITTLE15 » **PRICE:** FREE

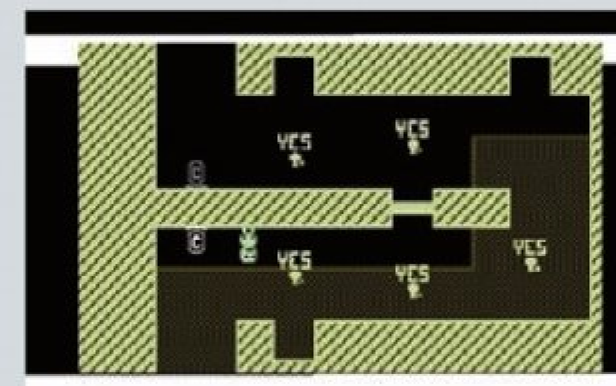
***Little 15* is** a picture shuffling game; a computer-aided version of those toys occasionally given away with certain burger chain promotions where a picture is split into a four-by-four tile grid with a gap at one corner to allow the tiles to move. As with the physical toy, the game is simple: the tiles are shuffled around by the computer and the player is challenged to return them to their starting positions.

And that's about it. Although a clock keeps an eye on how long the game has taken there isn't a time limit, and while there are four pictures to choose from before the game starts – two easily recognisable as Albert Einstein and Clint Eastwood – they've been rendered in two-colour monochrome high resolution, which looks pretty good before they're all mixed up but makes working out which bit belongs where more difficult.

66%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [C64] Upside down you're turning me.

>> Fighting gravity

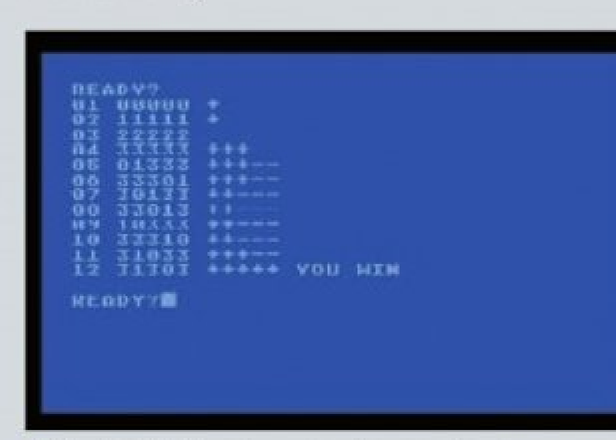
It came as something of a surprise to us, but all of the C64-influenced art in fairly famous indie platformer *VVVVVV* has actually inspired developer PaulKo64 to try cramming Terry Cavanagh's gravity-twisting puzzler into the breadbin! At the moment we've just seen a couple of still screens, but they look pretty much spot on and Terry himself has said that he's keen to see the result – and so are we!



» [Atari 8-bit] I want my mummy!

>> Fighting monsters

Dungeon Monsters has been worked on by Atari developers Vega and Tezz for about a year now and, as the name hints, it's an attempt to convert the ST and Amiga classic *Dungeon Master* to the Atari 8-bit. **http://kikstart.eu/dm-a8** leads to a work in progress page at a Polish website but there are a couple of screenshots and videos embedded showing a previous build of the code running.



» [[Atari 8-bit] Older than some of our readers!

>> Fighting your brain

Finally, we've got a new version of board game *Mastermind* and it's again for the Atari 8-bit – well, we say "new", but it's based on a version of a type-in listing written nearly 35 years ago by Steve Wozniak for Dr Dobbs Journal that has just been converted from the Apple 1 code! It's a little sparse at just 333 bytes, but it's still playable. Get it from **http://kikstart.eu/woz-mind**

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

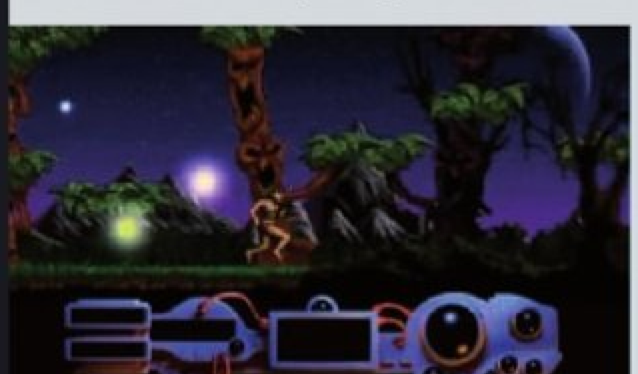
WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



>> Have you used your mech today?

Mommy's Best Games, whose previous spot of destruction *Shoot 1Up*, is just in the process of getting a new title into the Xbox Live Indie Games marketplace. And judging by the screenshots, *Explosionade* looks to be more shooting action, this time with a run-'n'-gun style and a heavily armed mech. Fingers crossed, more information and some in-game video footage should be available at **mommysbestgames.com**.



>> Armour of a different kind

Ovine By Design has been busy again – it'd be news if it had spent the last month in front of the telly, now we think about it – working on a little something it's calling *Antiriad-E*. Essentially, it's taken the original *Sacred Armour Of Antiriad*, updated the graphics and sound, and then strapped in *Shadow Of The Beast*-style parallax scrolling! There's a video of the preview hiding behind **http://kikstart.eu/antiriad-e**.

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **H.AW.X. 2.**

SO YOU'RE ABOUT to release H.A.W.X. 2 – what's a good way to promote it? How about releasing a free 'NES edition' in Flash with 8-bit presentation and fun 2D action similar to 1942? A great idea, although for some players might think it'll probably be more fun than the game being advertised! Visit it at http://kikstart.eu/hawx2

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .

Remake of the Mouth





L'ABBAYE DES MORTS

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MORTS

J.K

During the 13th Century an expelled subset of the Catholic Church called the Cathars were being hunted in the Languedoc region of France. One of their number, a priest called Jean Raymond, found an abandoned church in which to hide – this is probably the point that any semblance of reality and this game's back story part company, because we don't reckon that any Cathar locked themselves in a church only to discover a flip screen platform-based environment inhabited by bow and arrow-wielding skeletons, deadly bats or spitting plants in the basement – we took GCSE History and our teacher would've mentioned it!

Still, the real story probably wouldn't have made for quite as interesting a game, so we won't quibble too much – especially as *L'Abbaye Des Morts* is designed to resemble a Spectrum both sonically and graphically. A few liberties have been taken there as well so the Spectrum in question apparently doesn't suffer from colour clash. *L'Abbaye*'s developer Locomalito mentions on his website that, along with a visit to the area of France where the story is set, the main inspirations were classic Spectrum platformers *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*; it's also a little reminiscent of the Mojon Twins' work too, especially graphically. Although it occasionally gets picky about collisions, it can be entertaining and there's quite a reasonably detailed map to be explored.



WALLY WEEK IN MEDICATION MANIA

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/WALLYWEEK

J.K

After a break from finding himself thrust into videogame scenarios, Wally Week has taken too large a dose of cold medicine to the point where he has begun to hallucinate. He needs to see a doctor, but in his befuddled state that means finding various objects and returning them to famous game characters in exchange for keys that unlock the colour-coded gates between Wally and the surgery.

Although the game itself is sadly rather short – there are only four characters that want to be reunited with their missing items – and the graphics are a bit of a mixed batch and occasionally adult in nature, working through the puzzles and mini-games is fun stuff.



INFERNO

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/INFERNO

D.J

Although it may resemble many other Xbox Live Indie Games shoot-'em-ups, *Inferno* owes a debt to *Gauntlet* for its design and how everything happens within a maze chock full of fixed gun turrets, proximity-triggered mines, enemies spewing out homing bubbles or craft as well as more mobile defences; there are also power-ups and some of the levels have a concealed second exit leading to a bonus stage.

At 30 levels, including two boss battles, *Inferno* might feel just a little short for more experienced players and can be completed over a couple of sessions unless the hardest difficulty is selected, but the unlockable Game Plus feature that changes some of the in-game rules gives a little more longevity and it only costs 80 Points.



HOMEBREW HEROES

SINCE WE'VE TAKEN A LOOK AT TWO OF HIS GAMES OVER THIS AND THE PREVIOUS ISSUE, NOW SEEMED A VERY GOOD TIME TO SEE WHAT INDIE DEVELOPER **LOCOMALITO** HAD TO SAY FOR HIMSELF. SO ALTHOUGH HE TENDS TO REMAIN SOMEWHAT ANONYMOUS, WE HAD A GO!

Q&A

Retro Gamer: What was it that initially got you into writing games?

Locomalito: Arcade games left me crazy when I was little; they were powerful, full of action and intense feelings. I always dreamed of making games, drawing levels on math books, you know… and since they appeared some accessible tools for game development I have started to work in them in my spare time.

RG: And what led to your policy of giving away your games?

LM: I started developing videogames as a hobby and this is just how I like it to be, so I don't need to think of players as 'potential clients', but as people with whom I can share my games. Also, I think I can use that to put my little seed in bringing back dead game genres that I miss in the present.

RG: What would you consider the most enjoyable and difficult parts of developing games?

LM: The most enjoyable thing is when I play for testing the way the gameplay feels, and then I change everything for balancing it to my own likes. Sometimes I put some stuff in only to have a bit of fun while testing, and then I'll remove it (or not) for the final version.

The worst thing is when I am finishing a game, with more debugging than developing, and meanwhile I'm thinking in the next one, in which I can't work because I'm full of work with the present one. That's very annoying; games should be completed on their own!



» [PC] Ever get the feeling you're being followed?



» [PC] On-hold exploration title *Grialia*.

RG: Of the games you've worked on to date, which would be the game you're most proud of, and why?

LM: *Hydorah*, because it's the game I always wanted to make since I was a kid – it's my little kitty.

RG: And what plans do you have for the future? Any genre you'd like to try but haven't to date?

LM: I'm working on a platform game called *The Curse Of Issyos*, and I also have plans for an exploration game called *Grialia*, which is frozen but already started.

RG: And finally, what advice can you give to any would-be indie developers reading?

LM: Just make the games that you love as you love them, then polish them a little and surely people will also feel the love that you put into them while playing. That will be a good pillar for a videogame future.

HIGH FIVE

The homebrew games that Locomalito can't live without

1. **La Mulana (PC)** Because it requires every game skill that I may have had in my life.
2. **Virtual Silence (PC)** It has a very interesting argument and ambience.
3. **Knytt (PC)** It was the first 2D game that let me stay for a while in a lonely place, doing nothing but hearing the wind.
4. **Dave's Day Out (PC)** I had a lot of unexpected fun playing it.
5. **VVVVVV (PC)** It's a game full of feeling; I can't stop loving it.



» [PC] How *Doom* would look on an NES?

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



» **[Arcade] It was Hiroshi Masui and not Yu Suzuki who was the brains behind *OutRun 2*. It was Steve Lycett and not Yu Suzuki who handled the excellent home port. See? Legend.**

LEGEND SCHMEGEND 2

Dear Retro Gamer,

The person who emailed their opinion that you continually overuse the term 'legend' certainly has a point. It also bothers me when you make such statements so lightly just because these are the only people you can get to interview. Have you actually seen a dictionary lately?

And, just when I thought Retro Gamer could understand as little about games as possible, they go and embarrass themselves almost beyond riposte by attempting to defend their original ludicrous statement that 'Steve Lycett was a legend'. Are you so stupid that you actually think that this nobody is the brains behind *OutRun 2*? When in reality he's just some glorified manager overseeing his sub-par programming team as they shit out a jerky, ruined port of an actual genius' classic arcade game (Yu Suzuki). The only other things Lycett has overseen are a shambolic tennis game and a beyond empty *Mario Kart* clone. Please don't tell me that you consider these two utter atrocities as your favourite recent Sega games. Jesus Christ, you've got a lot to learn.

Here are a few more accurate, mathematical equations for you:

Steve Lycett + *OutRun 2* = a spoilt classic with a terrible fluctuating frame rate and lack of steering wheel support.

Steve Lycett + *OutRun 2* = one lucky bastard whose career only continues because Sega naively trusted his team with such a quality game instead of doing the right thing and converting it itself.

Steve Lycett + *OutRun 2* = a magazine acting like an immature schoolkid by assuming that creatively redundant suits who appear on the end credits of a port are in any way responsible for actual genius.

Cheers,

Louis Simons

Thanks for the letter, Louis. We passed it over to Steve and all had a good laugh about it. Yes, we're admittedly capable of hyperbole, but in our defence we're journalists. That's what we do. We're fully aware that Steve didn't create the original *OutRun 2* but he and the rest of his talented team are behind the excellent home ports, as well as standalone game *OutRun 2006 Coast 2 Coast*, and that makes him a legend in our books.

Also, if you do actually read our magazine you'll know exactly what we think about *Sega Superstars Tennis* and *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing*. Your equations were really funny as well. But the best part of all, though, was when you embarrassed yourself beyond riposte by suggesting that *OutRun 2* is a game by Yu Suzuki. And you think we've got a lot to learn…

STAR LETTER

YOUNGSTERS LOVE RETRO TOO



» **Rob has fond memories of *Magicland Dizzy*, and abusing his mate's brother with a football.**

Dear Retro Gamer,

I have just received the 25 years of Mario edition of your magazine with the advent calendar cover and the postman didn't even bend it!

I'm a bit concerned, though, as the tag in the corner stated "Retro Games Ages 30+". You what? Us 20-somethings are down with retro too, you know!

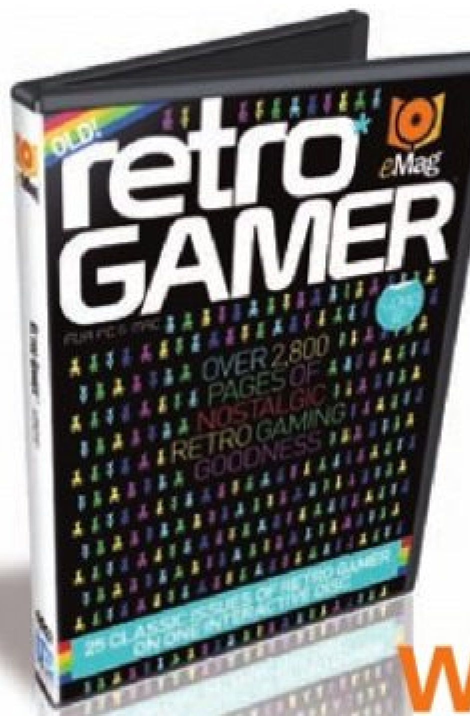
Kicking a football at my mate's brother for 20 minutes while *Magicland Dizzy* loaded on the C64; having World Cup tournaments on *Sensi*; playing *Micro Machines* on the A500+; combining high-scores on *Golden Axe*, *Rainbow Islands*, *Alien Breed*, *CJ's Elephant Antics*, *Lotus Turbo Challenge 2*, *Mortal Kombat 2*, *Body Blow Galactic*, *Pang!*, *Pinball Fantasies*, *Turrican 2* and *Dogs Of War* to see who was the best gamer in the world (where the world was actually from two lamp posts down to the corner towards the shops).

Cosy nights in playing *Simon The Sorcerer*, *Spellbound Dizzy*, *Push-Over*, *Syndicate* and *Cannon Fodder* while my brother and his mates were getting chased off the park in the cold rain for drinking 20-20 and smoking tea-bag cigarettes; designing Transformers and football shirts on Deluxe Paint 4 and printing them off on a Citizen Swift 9 dot matrix (another lovely nostalgically beautiful sound) to show my mates at school. All the above are just a few of my happy memories.

Retro is for everyone! Long live Retro Gamer!

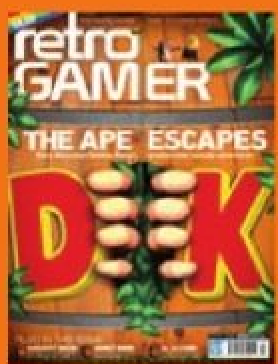
Rob Jones

Thanks for sharing your childhood memories with us Rob, and we can certainly relate to many of them. We certainly didn't mean to offend anybody with the cover age. It's just a bit of fun – and the vast majority of our readership is in that bracket – but it's great to hear that the magazine appeals to everyone, regardless of age.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

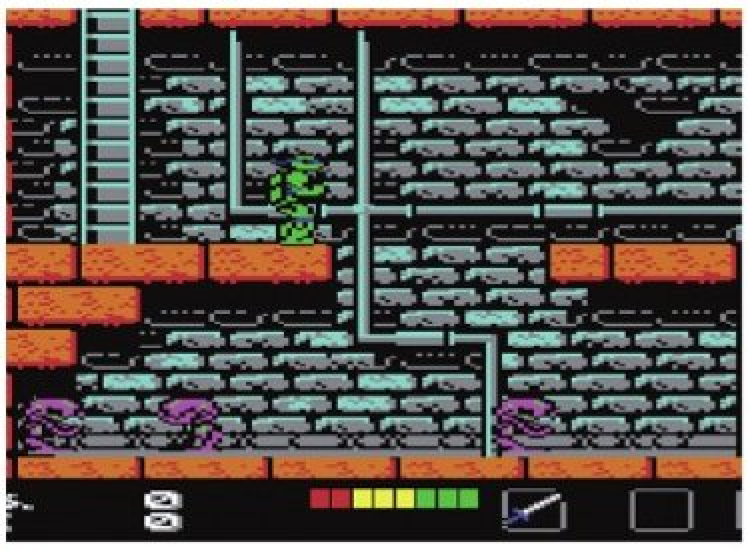
Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



» YOUTUBE UPDATE

THIS MONTH DARRAN'S continued looking at Virtual Console releases, but has also found time to put up several videos of the excellent *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow*. There's also a short video dedicated to our new award. You'll find it all at the usual place.

www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz



» [C64] We're unlikely to review this game any time soon, but we'd wager that a lookback at the turtles is long overdue.

TURTLE POWER

Dear Retro Gamer,

I always buy the magazine and I was hoping that you could do a review of the first *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* game that was released on the Commodore 64. I had all the other *Turtles* games, but can only vaguely remember that one and I didn't get very far with it. I completed the arcade version and would like to learn more about this one. Thank you very much.

Darren Harwood, via email

We're unlikely to devote an article to this particular game any time in the neat future, but there's no reason why we can't put together a feature about the heroes in a half shell.

A LIKELY STORY

Dear Retro Gamer,

I have a question. Firstly though, let me explain: back in the old days, me and my friend Todd would always argue about which computer had the better games – I had my Apple II and he his Tandy TRS-80 model III – and the arguments never abated until one day I could take his insolence no longer.

We'd been arguing about who had the better driving game. I'd contended that *Autobahn* was far superior to his 'TRASH-80' *Formula 1*, and back and forth we'd go, until I proceeded to whack him across the head with his keyboard, which meant, being a self-contained unit as the TRS-80 was, the entire 6.5kg machine also. Anyway, about a week later I get a call from him from the hospital telling me that not only did they have to dislodge a key from his eye socket but also a 4K RAM chip had somehow got lodged inside his head, to which I curtly replied, "Yeah, well now you've got more brains, haven't you?" and promptly hung up, giggling with uncontrollable mirth.

But it's all settled now, that was a long time ago and we've both of course grown up, have families and so forth and are mature adults who look back at it all and have a good laugh over a few beers.

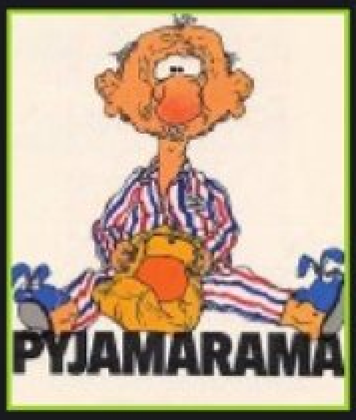
So, my question is: I'm wondering if maybe in the future you might be looking at doing a feature on the Worst Gaming Machines of All Time, and headlining with perhaps the Tandy TRS-80 model III? I just think this would be something readers would very much like to see, and last thing I heard recently was that Todd has been bedridden for some months with some kind of nasty virus and I'd very much like to send him a copy of the feature if it eventually appeared.

Yours faithfully, Rob

Oh Rob, you are naughty. Your amusing anecdote is relevant, though, as there »

> "Are you so stupid that you think this nobody is the brains behind OutRun 2?"

RETRODATE PROFILE



Name:	Arne Oynes
Joined:	18 June 2010
Location:	Harsted, Norway
Occupation:	Sales Manager
Website:	Not given
Fave Games Systems:	ZX Spectrum



» [Amiga] A look at flight simulators is definitely on the cards. Look for it in the new year.

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 71,340



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: GALAGA 88

Why I picked it: Because *Donkey Kong Jr* was too hard

Handy tip: You'll start with one less life, but using the dual ship is a great way to ensure that you hit all enemies.



High Score: 41,608



CRAIG

CHOSEN GAME: TETRIS (C64)

Why I picked it: Pure nostalgia and the great soundtrack, given that it's certainly not the best version of the game.

Handy tip: Use a decent joystick and realise you can pause the game.



High Score: 10,060



DAVID

CHOSEN GAME: CANABALT

Why I picked it: It's just horribly addictive and I find myself returning to it again and again and again.

Handy tip: Just keep looking ahead and beware of the mist.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite moment in GoldenEye?

jdanddiet I love the beginning of the ship level, but that's mainly because of the really cool music.

Roo I'll say it: pretty much any Friday night multiplayer session I used to have with my mates. I can't wait to start these up again come 5 November.

The Master The wanton shagging.

RetroBob So many to choose from! Headshotting the guy from above in the toilet; hearing people get annoyed when killed by a well hidden proximity mine; being the only person who knows where the Golden Gun is!

ipmarks The way it had proper film-like titles, and the James Bond shooting down the gun sight bit at the beginning.

Flat Eric There are so many big moments in *GoldenEye*.

Probably the best moment for me: getting two weapons akimbo style and rushing through the train level.

Kilb Speed running the first level against my friend (that damn padlock!)

thl Specialising with those gadgets that includes electromagnet, laser and remote mine detonator. Amazingly it's all done by that watch.

yakmag The fact that it gave the flagging *Bond* films a shot in the arm (rebooted the franchise before the term was even coined!) And the game wasn't bad either…

Best bit? Probably putting in the cheat code to give enemies gigantic noggins…

harlequ1n Playing multiplayer with three other people on a tiny old TV set and feeling like the master of the world after winning! Good old days.

boggyb68 The bit where Bond races the bird in the Ferrari… never played the game, unfortunately.

Fishsta For me, the Frigate and Train levels were amazing. But the absolutely crowning moment was the 007 mode after completing the game totally.

Being able to muck about with the accuracy and awareness settings meant you could give yourself a real task, especially cranking the settings up a bit on the Train. Intense is not the word!

Mayhem Finally completing Facility on 00 Agent difficulty in under 1:05 and unlocking all the cheats properly without using the (later revealed) secret code to get them all…

Fred83 Donning the suit and being Mr Bond.

Mire Mare Realising for the first time that I was in the air vent, in the Chemical Factory, on the Facility level. Then dropping down into the toilets and out into the corridor I could barely believe that I was playing a game that so accurately portrayed the scenes and sets from the film. I was in Arkhangelsk, I was Bond and I was trying to save the world!

Ralph Milne's Left Foot 'The off button'. Overrated gash pap, and this is from someone who loves the *TimeSplitters* series. I detest *GoldenEye*!

Miketendo For a very short time in high school I was in a band. We played *GoldenEye* more than we practised.

thevulture Finding my way out of that wretched snow level. Much as I loved *GoldenEye*, that level = aimless wandering and frustration. Huge relief getting past that.

Morkin *GoldenEye* sums up my N64 experience in a nutshell, as I bought the game when it was packaged along with the console and the gold controller. (In fact I actually ordered it over the phone while at work, hiding behind my PC screen).

The smell of that new console and the sound of *GoldenEye* starting up was pure magic. Look everyone! I'm James Bond! Only trouble was I could only play it for 30 minutes or so before I got a splitting headache…

Dunjohn Finally deciding that no one was allowed to pick OddJob because he's too short to be fair.

Riddler The best gameplay moments for me was when playing the bunker level and having to escape the cells with the watch magnet, using a knife to kill the guard, stealing his gun then shooting CCTV cameras. The little explosion they gave off was just so satisfying. This was just James Bond stuff at its best.

Cafeman Never owned it, but I remember at a kiosk playing with the sniper scope in the night, snowflakes coming down. That was pretty cool right there.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

RUBBISH SONICS

Crunchy With the mediocre *Sonic The Hedgehog* games being removed from retail in Europe, is it worth picking a few of these up for the future?

killbot The thing is, however bad these games may have been they tended to sell reasonably well. So even if new copies are being taken off the shelves they'll still be pretty easy to pick up second-hand.

MegaMixer Did that DS compilation sell well? I'm guessing not. I certainly don't see it around much.

Coxy No one has mentioned *Sonic The Hedgehog* on the 360 and PS3 – not only the worst *Sonic* but also possibly the worst game I've ever played!

JD! The true indication that things were starting to go downhill was when they renamed Robotnik to "Doctor Eggman." Worst. Name. Change. Ever!

SPLATTERHOUSE

van Another one getting the reboot treatment. Will be out in US sometime in late November. I will buy it, but I am expecting another ho-hum third-person action game with little in terms of innovation.

felgekarp I saw some footage of it today; I thought it looked entertaining enough.

RetroKingSimon I've been playing the original a bit lately and I remember wondering why there hadn't been a sequel recently. Given how violent and gory people seem to like games these days, it'd be ideal.

James Anyone know if these are the uncut versions of the original three *Splatterhouses*? If so that would be a nice little bonus.

OBSCURE GBA GAMES

Smurph I've checked the recommendations thread, and there aren't too many GBA games recommended, so I'm looking for something a bit out of the ordinary.

Morkin I can't think of many obscure games, save for maybe: *Car Battler Joe*, *Guru Logic Champ*, and *Koro Koro Puzzle Happy Panechu*. I spent a lot of time on both *Klonoa* GBA platformers and really enjoyed them – *Polarium Advance* is great fun also. *Hamtaro Ham Ham Heartbreak* was a very guilty pleasure…

Matt_B *Rebelstar Tactical Command* is a must have. Indeed it's the only GBA game I still play on the DS.

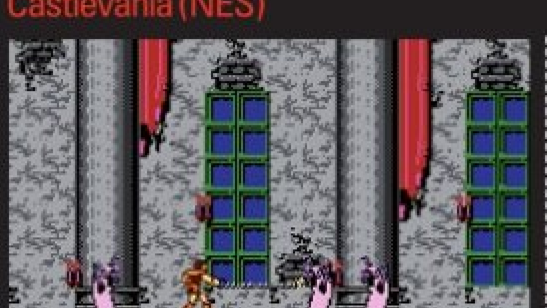
PresidentLeever Perhaps not obscure, but I have to recommend *Mother 3*. One of the best game experiences I've had in recent years.

Edwards80 Not sure if it counts, but *QWAK* for the GBA is pretty obscure. There were only 300 carts made…

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which Castlevania is the best?

Castlevania (NES)



Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow



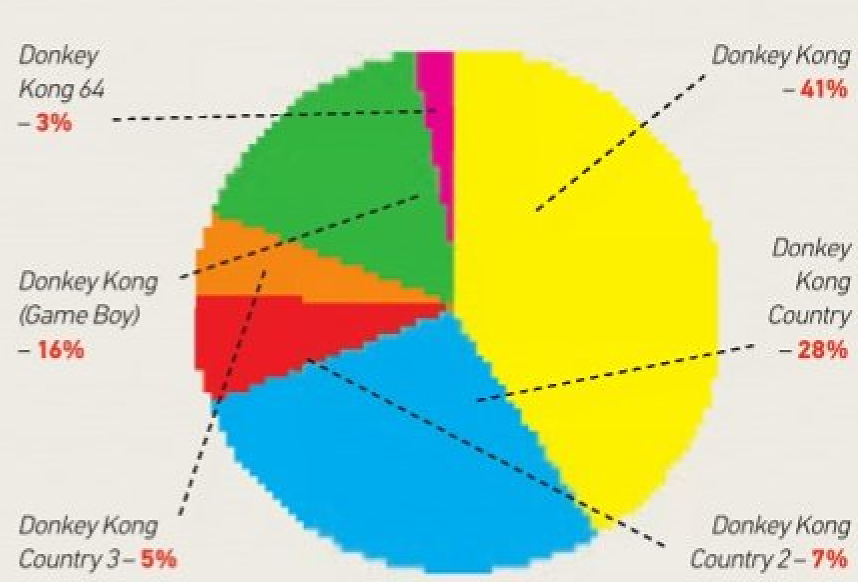
53% | 47%

Kai Just love the NES version!

JetSetWilly The chance to ride a giant bug, Patrick Stewart and loads of hacking and slashing.

HOT TOPIC

Best Donkey Kong Game



"Gameboy *DK* for me. It starts off like the original, but then you realise it's much, much more. Mario learned to backflip here, for starters" **– Tellah**

"I've only played the first one, but I like it, and I've never been bothered enough by the others to have a go" **– necronom**

"All pretty good games, but it has to be the original" **– deadpan666**



[Amiga] Here's a sneak peek at just one of the Amiga games we'll be looking at next month.

have been a lot of request for older and lesser known machines. So much so in fact that we're introducing an article this very issue. Enjoy.

FLIGHT OF FANCY

Hi Darran,

I was thinking the other day that I must have been reading **Retro Gamer** for about six years now. Where does the time go, eh? Even the mighty *Mean Machines* lasted only for two years. **Retro Gamer** is a fantastic magazine and always a joy to read.

Apart from retro games and hardware my other interest is flight simulators, Particularly Microsoft ones, but I have used them even in the days of the Speccy. I was wondering if there has been a feature on such or have I missed it in a previous issue (I have most issues but not all of them)? It would be interesting to see how it's evolved over the years to its current state, especially the ones running on today's top-end PCs (just check out the realistic flights on YouTube). As you may know, Microsoft's sim has quite a history behind it which I believe goes back about 30 years now.

Seeing as *Flight Simulator X* is now about four years old but still thriving due to third party software (Scenery/Aircraft etc) and the recent announcement of the upcoming *Microsoft Flight*, it would be interesting to have a feature on this.

Anyway, here's to the future of **Retro Gamer**. I hope it continues for many years.

PS I enjoy your YouTube vids too.

All the best, Simon Forward



Here's a look at the awesome piece of art that Toni sent in.

> "I'd contended that Autobahn was far superior to his 'TRASH-80' Formula 1"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Winning at the GMAs

This month we've been consoling Steve, because our designer didn't actually receive an invite to the Game Media Awards. We did send him a photo of a chip on the night and several texts saying that we'd won, but Steve lamented that it wasn't quite the same. We even gave him a limited edition Codemasters magnet, which was part of our prize, but he still wasn't happy.

We've not put together anything on flight simulations (although they have been mentioned in various developer lookbacks). We'll aim to rectify this in the future once we've found out a way to do the genre justice.

PICTURE PERFECT

Hey Retro Gamer,

I just want you guys to know that you really inspired me over the last couple of months to do this illustration. Since a picture can say a thousand words, I suggest checking my latest image named '16-bit Memories'. This one is dedicated to Amiga 500, but I must admit I was the owner of Atari ST 1040, and although I had great time playing on that computer, Amiga had better sound and graphics capabilities. I always loved game intros and those really inspired me to become what I am today (I work at Blur Studio, a company that specialises in producing intros for games).

All the best, Toni via email

That's an excellent piece of art, Toni. Don't worry, there will be more Amiga coverage in the very next issue of the magazine.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Magic The Gathering Online

Another month of *Magic* and Darran is beginning to remember that other games actually exist. That's hardly surprising, as *Scars Of Mirrodin* has just been released and all he's done is take part in tournament drafts.

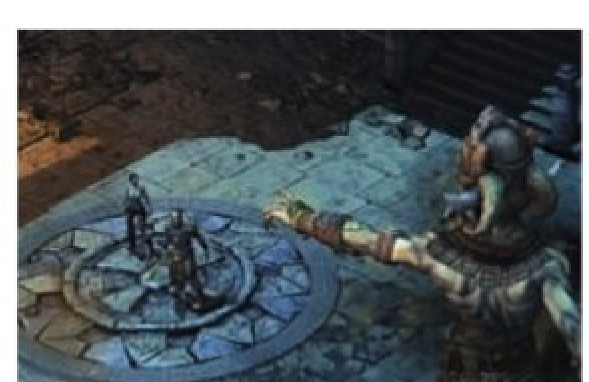




CRAIG

Bit.Trip Beat

As WiiWare fans will be aware, *Bit.Trip Beat* smashes *Pong* into *Guitar Hero* with a hammer, creating intense reaction-based rhythm action in what's unashamedly very much a retro videogame.





DAVID

Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light

This is an utterly fantastic return to form for Lara Croft that is still keeping me enthralled, despite it taking an absolute age to get off level five the first time around.

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next month

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A Rare Vintage

Next month's festive issue finishes off the year with a trip to Rare and a discussion of the company's highs and lows during the past 25 years

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE



The Terminal Man

■ We speak to magazine artist Oliver Frey about the creation of the cult comic that started off life in *Crash* magazine



Banshee

■ We go behind the scenes and speak to the developers of one of the Amiga's most spectacular shmups



Shadow Of The Colossus

■ Find out why Team Ico's magnificent game will still be getting played in years to come as a future classic



Ninja Gaiden

■ We chat with the creators of one of gaming's toughest franchises and follow the adventures of Ryu Hayabusa


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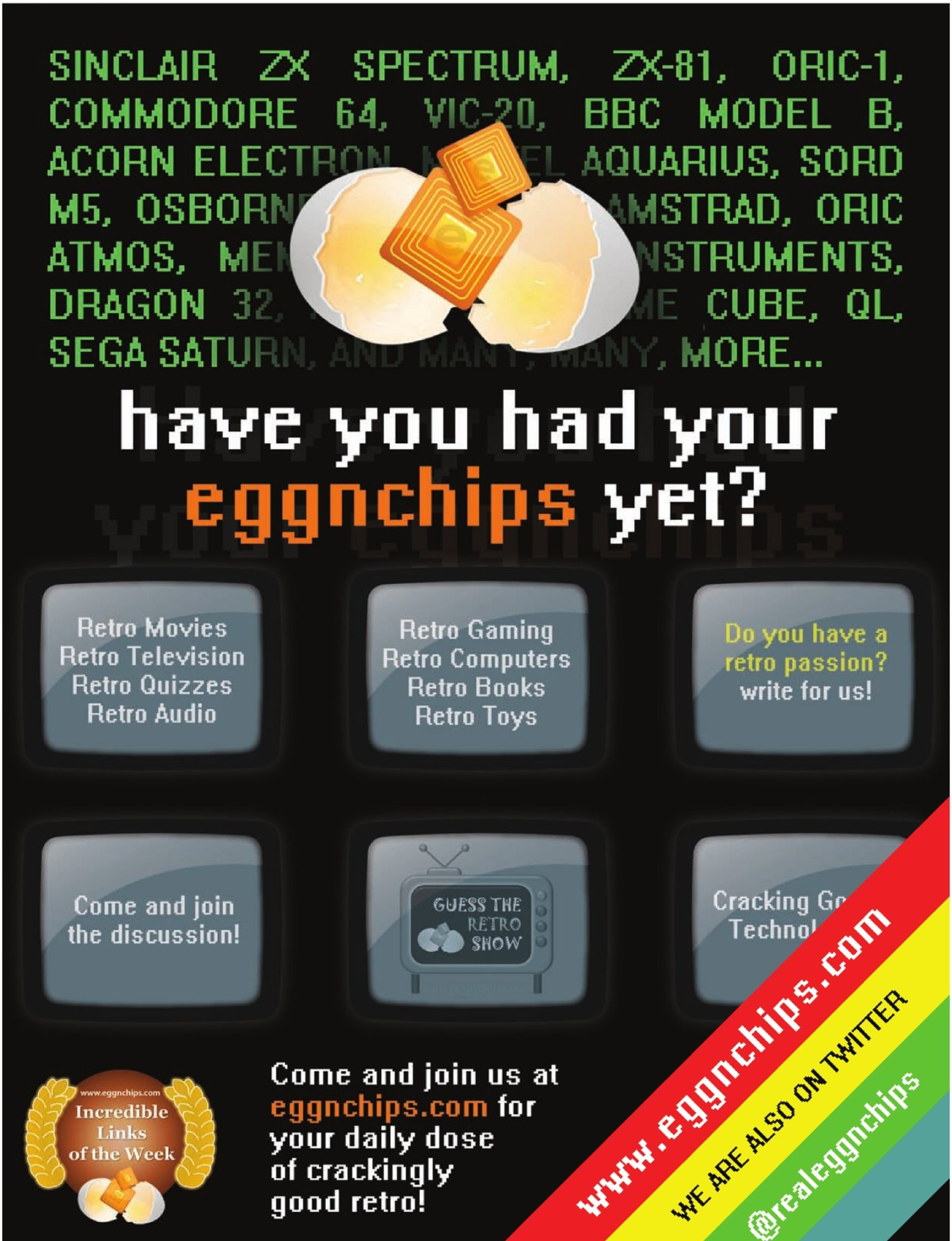
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ENDGAME



LAST BATTLE

» Generally we feature good games here, but we thought we'd try something different: we ventured out onto the streets and asked people to name the worst game ever made. Nearly everyone answered: 'That Mega Drive game that looked and smelled like a rat king.' When we responded with, 'Do you mean Last Battle?' all of them screamed like Homer Simpson.



01

» If you've managed to endure its gameplay, the last battle in *Last Battle* is against Garokk, seen here bathing an invisible unicorn. And yes, our hero does get frozen mid-punch, which kind of makes him seem all aggressive.



02

» After Aarzak defeats Garokk using the same punch move over and over again, Garokk's feet randomly burst into flames. Despite this, the affable villain has the good manners to bid us farewell. If you're a fan of Garokk, best look away now.



03

» Now you might be wondering where Garokk is in this screenshot. He can be found hidden behind that thick curtain of blood hanging just to the right of Aarzak – still stood there, frozen in that stupid punch pose, looking ridiculous.



04

» When the blood curtain falls away, we see that Garokk has been transformed into a hideous pus creature. While gross and excessive, we're starting to discover a new-found respect for *Last Battle*. This ending must have freaked kids out back in 1989.



05

» Aarzak snaps out of whatever mysterious freeze spell he was under and pulls out a horse from seemingly nowhere. He then makes his way back to his home in Essex, where he discovers that his nan, Mmavis, has been knitting him a turtleneck jumper.



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